

Sharon says he was offered Israel's defence ministry

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israeli Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon said on Sunday that he was asked by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to replace ousted defence minister Yitzhak Mordechai but refused. "He offered me the post and I refused. I told him that I am quite content where I am," Sharon said in a live interview with public television. On Saturday Netanyahu fired Mordechai, finalising the rupture between the two rivals ahead of May elections. Netanyahu immediately said he had asked former defence minister Moshe Arens, an elder statesman who had been leading an internal revolt against the prime minister inside the governing Likud party, to return to the post.

Jordan Times

An independent Arab political daily published by the Jordan Press Foundation
جوردان تيمز يومية سياسية تصدر بالانجليزية عن المؤسسة الصحفية الأردنية، الراي.

Clinton lacks respect for presidency, Bush says

RENO (AP) — Former President George Bush thinks Bill Clinton lacks respect for the presidency, but believes the country will bounce back after Clinton's impeachment trial ends. "I have tried to stay out of all the Washington mess," Bush said Saturday at the end of a keynote address to the Safari Club International's 27th annual hunters' convention. "But I must confess I have been deeply concerned by what appears to be a lack of respect for the office I was so very proud to hold." Speaking to an audience of international big-game hunters and conservationists, Bush was confident any national embarrassment caused by Clinton's sex scandal would be short-lived.

Gunmen kill 30 people in eastern Angola ambush

LUANDA (AP) — Gunmen killed 30 people, including police officers, and wounded several others in an ambush on two vehicles in northeastern Angola, according to news reports Sunday. The attack occurred Saturday on the road from Saurimo to Luena, about 800 kilometres east of the capital Luanda, the private Radio Ecclesia reported. The radio said that survivors blamed the attack on the UNITA rebel group, which has been battling the government's army since a two-decade civil war resumed last month after four years of frail peace.

18 dead, 40 injured in Austria crash

GRAZ (AFP) — Eighteen people were killed and 40 other injured, 25 seriously, when a bus carrying Hungarian tourists crashed near Deutschlandsberg, in south-east Austria, police said. The bus skidded off the road for unknown reasons and plunged several metres onto a field.

Colombia death squad chief offers truce to rebels

BOGOTA (R) — The leader of Colombia's most feared ultra-right death squad said in an interview published on Sunday that he would call a truce if his Marxist guerrilla enemies stopped kidnapping civilians. But Carlos Castano, head of an outlawed paramilitary alliance known as the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC), said he would not lay down his weapons until the rebels halted their long-running war to topple the state. "The self-defence forces do not want to create an obstacle for the peace process. We would be ready to declare a ceasefire," Castano said in remarks in this week's edition of the *Cambio* political magazine.

Woman immolates self in Moscow

MOSCOW (AP) — An unidentified woman poured a flammable liquid over herself and set herself on fire Sunday evening near Moscow University. She died as police arrived, the Interfax news agency reported. Passersby had tried to put out the flames, but failed to save the woman, Interfax said. No motive for the suicide has been established.

Belgian, Dutch authorities agree on deportations

BRUSSELS (AFP) — Belgium and the Netherlands will jointly carry out forced deportations, flying rejected asylum applicants home in corporate jets, the Belgian interior ministry announced Sunday. The two governments will finalise the details of the joint immigration plan by late February, Interior Minister Luc Van den Bosch told Flemish VTM television. The plan is the result of recommendations published Friday by an immigration commission appointed after the death of a Nigerian asylum seeker during her forced deportation from Belgium last year. The commission recommended that immigration authorities should not use commercial airlines for forced expulsions.

Iraqi FM storms out of ministerial meeting Sahhaf slams Arab states for 'plotting' against Iraq

CAIRO (AFP) — Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammad Said Al Sahhaf on Sunday accused Arab countries of plotting against Iraq after he stormed out of an Arab meeting here that failed to meet Baghdad's call for a unilateral lifting of U.N. sanctions.

"The document is a plot aimed at covering up new U.S. and British attacks on Iraq," Sahhaf said of a final statement which Arab foreign ministers adopted at the meeting called to discuss the Iraq crisis.

The meeting was still continuing amid efforts by some members to find a compromise, delegates told AFP, but the Iraqi foreign minister was scathing in his criticism of his Arab counterparts after his angry walkout.

"The Hureghada group, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia conspired to draw up a communiqué which instead of condemning the aggression on Iraq placed the responsibility on Iraq," Sahhaf told reporters.

The foreign ministers of Egypt, Yemen, Oman, Syria and Saudi Arabia met twice this month in the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Hureghada to map out Sunday's meeting.

"They are expressing their concern for the use of force and are setting up a follow-up committee to see about the lifting of the sanctions and yet Iraq is not a member of this committee. Instead they have chosen hostile countries like Saudi Arabia," Sahhaf complained.

He said the "useless and very negative" statement was adopted because of U.S. pressure on several Arab countries. Sahhaf aide Nabil Najm told



Security personnel keep the press away as Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammad Said Al Sahhaf storms out of an Arab foreign ministers meeting in Cairo on Sunday (AFP photo)

reporters the statement was "a cover up for maintaining forever the U.N. embargo."

"This statement is a mockery," Najm, an undersecretary at the Iraqi foreign ministry, told reporters at the Nile-front headquarters of the 22-member Arab League.

Baghdad wanted Arab foreign ministers to defy the crippling sanctions which the U.N. Security Council slapped on Iraq after its 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

It also wanted a strong and united Arab condemnation of last month's U.S. and British air strikes on Iraq. But in their final statement the foreign ministers did not call for an immediate lifting of the sanctions and did not con-

demn outright the U.S.-British strikes.

Instead they voiced their "deep concern and preoccupation over the use of military force against Iraq" and underlined "the need to multiply international efforts directed at lifting the embargo as soon as possible."

They further angered Baghdad by demanding an Iraqi apology for its invasion of Kuwait and by demanding that Iraq "immediately stop provoking its neighbours," linking this to future efforts aimed at lifting the embargo.

The statement urged Iraq "to take the necessary steps to prove its peaceful intentions towards Kuwait and other neighbours by admitting that

the Kuwaiti invasion was an error."

Kuwait and Saudi Arabia were adamant that Iraq should apologise for the invasion.

The Arab foreign ministers also called for a "diplomatic solution to implement all the resolutions of the Security Council concerning Iraq" and urged Baghdad "to cooperate with the Security Council in implementing these resolutions."

They set up a committee to follow up on efforts to lift the U.N. sanctions made up of Libya, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, as well as one other North African country and the Arab member of the U.N. Security Council.

Iraq boosting southern defences, governor says U.S. planes bomb Iraqi missile sites in north

Agencies

IRAQ IS boosting its air defences in the south, but is not threatening Kuwait, the governor of the southern city of Basra said.

"We are prepared for all eventualities," Ahmad Ibrahim Hammash told reporters late on Saturday when asked about reports that Iraq was sending extra military hardware to the area.

"The reinforcements are there. They are air defence reinforcements," he said, adding that Iraq would continue to challenge planes patrolling the Western-imposed no-fly zone.

"Everything we can reinforce, we are reinforcing.

More than that I cannot say," he said.

An Iraqi opposition group said on Friday that Iraq has been building up its armed forces, including missile systems, in the south since mid-December. The remarks followed a report that military convoys, including tanks, were seen heading south.

"Certainly, these moves are exceptional," rather than routine, the governor said. But he added that they represented a normal response for a country facing a threat.

Asked about the no-fly zones, the governor said: "We will challenge this aggression, and will continue to challenge it. We will not accept a mandate of anyone

upon us," he said.

On Sunday, U.S. fighter planes bombed two Iraqi surface-to-air missile systems in northern Iraq, according to a statement released by the U.S. military at Incirlik air base in Turkey.

An F-15E "Strike Eagle" fighter plane likely scored a "direct hit" on the Iraqi surface-to-air missile site "which posed a threat to coalition forces in the region," the statement said.

In a second incident, U.S. EA-6B and F-16CJ aircraft fired anti-radar missiles at another Iraqi missile site near Mosul in northern Iraq, the statement said.

According to the Northern Watch statement, the fighter

planes acted in self-defence after being "targeted by Iraqi radars used to guide anti-aircraft artillery."

The U.S. planes "fired several high-speed anti-radiation missiles," known as HARM missiles, said Pentagon spokesman Mike Milrod.

Another F-16 also fired an anti-radar missile at an Iraqi surface-to-air missile system in the region, Northern Watch said.

"Damage to Iraqi forces is currently being assessed," it added. "There was no damage to coalition aircraft, and all aircraft landed safely" at Incirlik.

(Continued on page 7)

Lower House congratulates King on his recovery, return

AMMAN (Petra) — The Lower House of Parliament Sunday congratulated His Majesty King Hussein on his recovery and safe return home and thanked God for blessing the King with His care.

Addressing his colleagues, House Speaker Abdul Hadi Majali hailed the return of the King as a historic moment for the Kingdom and the Jordanian people.

"On your behalf, I congratulate the King on his recovery and safe return home and I also express gratitude and appreciation of the kings, heads of state, leaders of Arab countries and officials who have expressed their heartfelt congratulations to the King, wishing him a speedy recovery from his illness, particularly Saudi Arabia,

Morocco, Oman, Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Algeria, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia, Qatar, the UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, Sudan and Lebanon," said Majali at the outset of a regular Parliament session.

Majali also thanked friendly nations whose leaders expressed their solidarity with Jordan and sent good wishes to the King during his treatment in the U.S. for cancer.

Majali said Parliament voiced its special gratitude to U.S. President Bill Clinton who, he said, stood by the King during his stay in the U.S. and who made available the best medical treatment and specialists to help the King overcome his illness.

Majali also expressed the House's appreciation of the team of doctors at the Mayo

Clinic and also to all people around the world who have wished the King a speedy recovery.

Majali implored God to bless the King with continued good health so that he may continue to lead Jordanians towards further progress and prosperity.

Addressing the House, Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh said the Cabinet shares with the parliamentarians their true feelings of affection and loyalty to the King, wishing him continued good health.

The prime minister said the people's true feelings and love for the King were expressed in their enthusiastic welcome of their leader upon his return to Amman by turning out in great numbers, braving the rain and inclement weather to express their joy.

Mordechai to join new party Netanyahu says former defence minister a 'loser'

TEL AVIV (Agencies) — Outgoing Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai announced on Sunday he was leaving Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's right-wing Likud to join a centrist party to challenge the Israeli leader in a May election.

Asked if he had not waited too long to leave Likud, Mordechai told Israel's Channel Two: "I am exactly at the right time going on a new path with wonderful people."

Mordechai said ex-army chief Amnon Lipkin-Shahak and former Likud members Roni Milo and Dan Meridor were also joining the new party.

Mordechai's announcement came 24-hours after Netanyahu fired him for consorting with his political opponents.

Earlier on Sunday, Netanyahu and Mordechai exchanged harsh criticism, accusing each other of deceit as the forthcoming election battle took shape.

Mordechai has yet to say whether he will lead the new party.

In his final cabinet meeting as defence chief, Mordechai, 54, donned a skullcap and read a verse from the Book of Psalms implying Netanyahu was a liar and an enemy of peace.

"Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips and a deceitful tongue," Mordechai said, citing Psalm 120.

"My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace. I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war," he said.

Mordechai, a relative dove, has criticised Netanyahu's suspension of the land-for-security peace accord they negotiated with the Palestinians last October and had for weeks been weighing his political future in their ruling Likud Party.

Netanyahu on Saturday night fired Mordechai, who tops the polls as the most popular cabinet minister, and accused him of plotting to oust the Likud-led government in elections next May as a leader in the new centrist party.

"He organised a conspiracy to topple the government in which he was serving," Netanyahu, 49, told Israel Radio on Sunday.

He said he had offered the defence ministry job to former Defence Chief Moshe Arens, who said he would answer the offer only after internal Likud elections on Monday, which he is expected to lose to Netanyahu.

Mordechai, born in Iraqi Kurdistan, would be the first candidate for prime minister representing Israel's Sephardic Jewish majority with roots in Middle Eastern or North African countries.

"Yitzhak Mordechai is a man who can lead not only the centrist party, but also the state of Israel," Milo told reporters outside

Mordechai's home on Saturday after the sacking.

A poll published in the *Yedioth Ahronoth* newspaper on Sunday found that a Mordechai-led centrist party could capture nearly a third of the voters who cast ballots for Netanyahu in 1996.

Netanyahu scoffed at the political danger posed by Mordechai. "He's not an electoral asset," he told the radio. "He's an opportunistic asset."

Later on Sunday, Mordechai held a further round of talks with the centrist party founders in Tel Aviv, reportedly to try to hammer out a party platform and find ways of deciding its leadership.

Lashing out at the emerging centrist party, Netanyahu said: "These four gentlemen have only one thing in common...They all want to be number one. Everyone of them is a loser."

Mordechai made an early departure from his final cabinet meeting to pray at the Western Wall, Judaism's sacred shrine in Jerusalem's walled Old City.

In a final biblical swipe at Netanyahu, he suggested the Israeli leader read chapter 15 of the Book of Samuel.

"And Samuel said unto Saul, I will not return with thee for thou hast rejected the work of the Lord and the Lord has rejected thee from being king over Israel," reads verse 26.

Politicians, activists reiterate call for reforms to strengthen democracy

By Francesca Ciriadi

AMMAN — Deputies and political activists on Sunday reiterated their call for political reforms, saying they hoped that any change in the line of succession to the Throne would be coupled with reforms that would enhance the country's infant democracy.

They said they hoped that a "comprehensive review" promised by His Majesty King Hussein in a televised address to the nation from London prior to his return home on Tuesday would include the introduction of more liberal laws — especially those dealing with press freedoms and parliamentary elections.

King Hussein, the region's longest-serving ruler, has yet to spell out the changes he intends to introduce to consolidate Jordan's stability and strengthen democratic reforms he initiated in 1989. But mounting speculation in the

capital's elite circles over the past few days has only focused on the issue of succession.

"It is the King's constitutional prerogative and right to choose his crown prince," a senior official told the Jordan Times.

"And no one is questioning that."

Officials yesterday also brushed aside some concerns raised at home and abroad about the foreign policies of the Kingdom, a crucial and patient partner in the Middle East peace process and a key Western ally.

A feeling of anticipation gripping the nation as it awaits the King's announcement of his "thoughts and ideas" for the country's future did not affect banks and the Amman Financial Market — often a barometer of popular sentiments.

"The Kingdom will always forge ahead with the policies of peace and moderation that the King has pursued for decades and that have

always been clear to everybody," said a senior official.

In addition to revising the succession, politicians said the King has difficult decisions to take on water, poverty, unemployment, corruption, administrative reform and the country's economic downturn.

While the deadlocked Israeli-Palestinian peace process is casting a heavy shadow over the region, lawmakers and politicians insisted on the urgency of introducing new election and press laws and the need for a review of the 1952 Constitution to enhance the role of Parliament, further protect human rights, and "modernise" the political system.

"The appointment of a new crown prince and democratic reforms are two separate issues," said Abdul Latif Arabiyat, secretary general of Jordan's strongest party, the Islamic Action Front. "It is up to His Majesty King Hussein to introduce reforms any time he decides, regard-

less of who his heir is," he added.

Leftist Deputy Nazih Ammarin (Karak) said altering the line of succession was "not the change" that politicians were seeking.

"We want changes in the press law, new electoral regulations, and a comprehensive review of the country's economic path," he told the Jordan Times.

The government and the Islamist-led opposition have been at loggerheads since the introduction of the election law in 1993 that brought the one-person, one-vote system to unequally divided constituencies.

Further amendments in 1997 to an already restrictive press law and an historic decision to boycott the November 1997 elections by the powerful Muslim Brotherhood, joined by nine opposition parties and the 80,000-strong Union of Professional Associations, as well as a list of more than 80 prominent politicians, added further fuel to the

fire. Despite orders from the King to carry out a national dialogue with all sectors of society, the five-month-old government of Fayez Tarawneh and the opposition have so far failed to make much headway, according to analysts and observers.

Several politicians and writers have seriously doubted that the much-talked about dialogue could ever lead to national reconciliation unless the government showed real intention to amend the elections and press laws — key pillars in a democracy.

The contention among politicians is that the government would not venture into amending those two laws unless it got the go ahead from the King.

Some also said several reforms were needed to guarantee the separation and integrity of the three branches of power.

A former minister, Jamal Sharr, a

veteran Ba'athist who has written extensive articles on the Constitution, told the Jordan Times in a recent interview that the country's national statute needed "first to be respected, and second to be amended, if we want to arrest the degradation of our political system."

Reformists of all shades have long said they would like to see a more independent judiciary, an extension to the four-month term for ordinary parliamentary sessions, and the abrogation of certain laws that limit citizens' constitutional rights.

"Have we forgotten all about the National Charter?" asked a former minister. Drafted in 1992 to push the country into a new era of liberalisation and political and social reconciliation after more than three decades of martial law, the National Charter called, among other things, for the establishment of a Constitutional Court, which has yet to become a reality.

Iraq ready to say sorry, but says Arabs should also apologise

BAGHDAD (AP) — Iraq sees no shame in apologising for its mistakes, provided other Arab countries do the same, the deputy prime minister said in unusually conciliatory comments published Sunday.

Iraq's demand for an apology from other countries appears directed against Kuwait, which Baghdad has historically accused of stealing its oil. The accusation helped lead to Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait and the 1991 Gulf War in which U.S.-led allies evicted Iraqi troops.

"If we want to open a new page, and Iraq is required to apologise for an incident, it will come within a collective apology that is just. We are ready for that," Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz was quoted as saying by Iraq's most influential newspaper, Babel.

The comments are a surprising reversal in Iraq's hardline attitude against some Arab countries — chiefly Saudi Arabia and Kuwait — for supporting the mid-December airstrikes on the country by the United States and Britain.

The timing of Aziz's comments are significant: they were published the day the 22-member Arab League began a meeting in Cairo to discuss Iraq's demand to condemn the U.S.-British airstrikes and call for Arab defiance of U.N. trade sanctions against Iraq.

In recent weeks, President Saddam Hussein had called on Arabs to overthrow their pro-American governments. Even Aziz, in lengthy newspaper commentaries, hurled insults at Arab leaders.

But Aziz, in his conciliatory remarks, invoked Arab solidarity and justified the

need for apologising by saying "after all, in the end, we are all sons of one tribe and mistakes could happen between us."

Babel picked up Aziz's comments from an interview he gave to Beirut's Al Nahar newspaper. It didn't say when Aziz spoke with Al Nahar.

"I don't say Iraq didn't make mistakes against this or that, but everybody has committed mistakes," Aziz said.

"If we all apologised to each other for all the mistakes we have committed, then we will be ready... because apologizing is not a shame between brothers," he added.

Iraq had repeatedly sought to justify the Kuwait invasion, which led to the imposition of U.N. trade sanctions.

Under the Gulf War ceasefire conditions, the sanctions cannot be lifted until Iraq is

certified by a U.N. arms commission as free of weapons of mass destruction.

The United States and Britain, which are opposed to lifting of the sanctions, had bombed Iraq to punish it after U.N. arms inspectors said Baghdad was blocking their work.

Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak has blamed Saddam for his country's woes and few Arab governments appear ready to break the sanctions. Still, Iraq is banking on the massive public sympathy among Arab people.

In the streets of Baghdad, there is high hope that the Arab League meeting will turn the tide in Iraq's favour.

"We ask some of the Arab leaders to face America, which wants to colonise the Arab countries," said Saad Al Hilli, a shopper.



PLAYING WITH SNOW: A Lebanese family decorates Sunday a snowman on their car during an outing in the Lebanese mountain area of Dahr Al Baydar, east of Beirut. A snowstorm has hit Lebanon in the past few days covering a wide range of the Mediterranean country with a white blanket (AFP photo)

No return to situation before air strikes — Iraq

BAGHDAD (AFP) — There can be no return to the situation regarding U.N. arms inspections which prevailed before last month's U.S. and British air strikes on Iraq, Baghdad's Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz said Saturday.

But, speaking to a visiting Spanish delegation accompanied by journalists, he added that Iraq was speaking to France about Paris's ideas for emerging from the current deadlock.

"There will be no return

to the past," Aziz said, reiterating Baghdad's refusal to allow the return of the arms inspectors of the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM).

Iraq accuses the inspectors of spying for the United States and Israel, and of submitting a deliberately negative report on Baghdad's cooperation to the U.N., paving the way for the air strikes.

Accepting their return would mean that Iraq had given in to aggression, Aziz said.

He added that the government was prepared to cooperate with France "on the basis of justice," but said the French plan was not likely to become a reality because Britain and the United States were opposed to it.

Paris proposed on Jan. 13 that the commission monitoring Iraq's disarmament be revamped, that the embargo on its oil exports be lifted, and that new surveillance measures be introduced to prevent the rebuilding of weapons of mass destruction.

Sudan says Britain blocks better ties with Europe

KHARTOUM (R) — Sudan accused Britain of obstructing better relations with the European Union as ministers from two EU member states began visits to see at first hand the impact of Sudan's long-running civil war.

"Britain has tended to adopt extreme attitudes against Sudan," Foreign Minister Mustafa Osman Ismail said on Saturday in remarks reported by the Sudanese news agency SUNA.

Ismail was referring to British Prime Minister Tony Blair's statements of support for a U.S. missile attack on the Shifa pharmaceuticals factory on the outskirts of Khartoum in August.

British diplomats left Khartoum after a mob of Sudanese

stoned the embassy.

Sudan says the factory produced only medicines, not ingredients for chemical weapons as alleged by Washington.

Norway's Minister of International Cooperation and Human Rights Hilde Frastad Johnson flew on Sunday to Wau, main town in the southern Bahr Al Ghazal region, at the centre of last year's famine aggravated by fighting and displacement.

State Radio Omdurman quoted Johnson as saying when she arrived in Khartoum with Italy's State Minister for Foreign Affairs Rino Serri for a four-day visit on Saturday that Norway was concerned about

Sudan's humanitarian problems.

Serri said Italy wanted to see an end to the war in the south. He was due to visit camps around Khartoum that house some of the thousands of southerners displaced by the fighting.

Italy and Norway are both partners of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), an East African regional grouping that has been mediating in Sudan's civil war. Ismail said on Saturday a possible extension of a ceasefire in Bahr Al Ghazal and northern Upper Nile state would be among topics to be discussed with the European delegation in Khartoum.

John Garang, leader of the rebel Sudan People's Liberation

Army has declared his readiness to prolong the truce, which expired on Jan. 15, for three months to help relief efforts.

United Nations officials have been trying to persuade the warring parties in southern Sudan to extend the cease-fire they say is crucial to keeping thousands of people alive.

Ismail said Britain continued to host Sudanese "opposition elements" and would not let Sudanese officials visit Britain.

He described Britain's stance as "unfair and unbalanced," saying Khartoum had been keen to normalise relations. Sudan was also keen to normalise ties and conduct a "serious dialogue" with the United States, he added.

Trial of Britons to start on Wednesday — Yemen

SANAA (R) — Five Britons and one man using a French passport arrested last month in Yemen and charged with planning an Islamist activist campaign there will be put on trial on Wednesday, a Yemeni official said Sunday.

"The court has received the investigation files from the prosecutor general and decided to start the hearings on Jan. 27," the official told Reuters.

Yemen said the six men have admitted possessing illegal weapons and intending to commit murder. But the defendants' lawyer said the men had denied the charges.

A British Foreign Office spokesman said earlier the men had been charged with "associating with armed gangs with a criminal plan to commit murder."

The men were arrested on Dec. 24 on suspicion of links with Islamists blamed for bombings in the southern port city of Aden and with a kidnapping gang whose abduction of 16 Western tourists led to the deaths of three British hostages and Australian last month.

Yemen has separately charged three Islamists with kidnapping and murder over the abduction of the 16 tourists.

Algerian ruling party divided on candidate

ALGIERS (R) — Divisions emerged in Algeria's main governing party on Sunday when its leaders openly differed on selecting a candidate for the forthcoming presidential election.

National Democratic Rally (RND) Chief Tahar Benbaibiche said in a statement that he would summon representatives to a congress to select a candidate from within the party to succeed current President Liamine Zerrouk.

The congress would take place on Feb. 4, he said.

But top party officials rebelled against Benbaibiche, calling a meeting of the party's policy-making National Council on Tuesday to endorse former Foreign Minister Abdelaziz Bouteflika as a candidate for the April election.

Bouteflika, who is not a member of the RND, is widely seen as an army-backed candidate.

Benbaibiche declared the move by the party rebels as illegal.

"The party rules state clearly that significant issues must be decided on by a party congress," he said.

Benbaibiche's opponents, who include ministers and parliamentarians, said that he had lost the support of most of the party's top leadership and his decisions were "null and void."

RND senior officials who oppose the party chief and back Bouteflika's candidacy say they number more than 160, or more than two-thirds of the National Council. They say this entitles them under party rules to hold a council meeting

to endorse Bouteflika whom they consider the "candidate of national consensus."

They are considering whether to replace Benbaibiche at Tuesday's meeting.

Benbaibiche said early this month that army generals were pressuring his party's members to back Bouteflika. Among Benbaibiche's supporters in the party is Mohammed Betchine, a former top aide to Zerrouk and ex-military intelligence chief.

The RND has 156 seats in the 380-member parliament and its members control most government ministries. Its junior partners are the former ruling National Liberation Front (FLN) and the Islamist-based Movement for a Peaceful Society (MPS). Former Foreign Minister

Ahmad Taleb Ibrahim and a former adviser to Zerrouk, Youssef Al Khatib, sent a letter on Sunday to the president urging him to dismiss 12 ministers who had announced their support for Bouteflika.

Ibrahim and Al Khatib, who are both candidates in the election, said they feared government bias towards Bouteflika as the cabinet is in charge of conducting the vote.

The government has repeatedly vowed to ensure a fair competition between all candidates.

Algeria has been racked by violence and political instability since early 1992 when the authorities cancelled a general election in which radical Islamists had taken a commanding lead.

Saudi launches Internet, but not all ISPs ready

MANAMA (R) — Saudi Arabia began to extend its Internet service to local service providers (ISPs) this month, allowing local inhabitants cheap access to the world wide web, industry officials said on Sunday.

They said the King Abdul Aziz City for Science and Technology (KACST), the body charged with supervising the net, extended the service to about seven ISPs from Jan. 2. It is free of charge for one month.

"We have extended the Internet to our customers in Riyadh, Jeddah and Dammam in the past two weeks," ISP project manager at the Dammam-based Com-

pulink Information System, Mohammad Ansar, told Reuters.

Previously, people living in Saudi Arabia could only access the service by making expensive international calls to ISPs in neighbouring countries, like Bahrain.

"Up to now only about seven ISPs are ready. It's now in the testing phase for about a month as a free service, but full operation will start from the first week of February," Ansar said.

"Only around seven ISPs, out of around 20 qualified, have been connected. Only seven are active, others are not prepared yet to receive the service," he added.

Ansar said apart from restrictions imposed by KACST on some contacts, everything was working fine. The billing system was also not yet fully operational, he added.

Another Riyadh-based ISP, the Al Geriery Group, said it had started providing the service to customers in the kingdom over the past two weeks.

"For the past two weeks we were ready and we provided the Internet to very selective individuals only because of a limitation on the number of modems assigned to the company," Chief Executive Officer Ibrahim Al Moalqel told Reuters.

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel. 4773111-19

PROGRAMME TWO

16:10 Cartoon — Batman
16:30 David Copper Field
17:00 Neighbours
17:30 Thalassa
18:15 Omar Ben Abdul Aziz
19:00 News in French
19:15 French Prog.
19:30 News Headlines
19:35 The Parenthood
20:00 The Internet Cafe
20:30 Big Sky
21:30 Encounter
22:00 News in English
23:30 'Gala Performance'
00:00 End of T.X

PRAYER TIMES

05:09 Fajr
06:29 (Sunrise) Duha
11:48 Dhuhr
14:42 'Asr
17:06 Maghreb
18:27 'Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church
Sweith, Tel. 5920740
Assemblies of God Church Tel.
4632785
St. Joseph Church Tel. 4624590
Terra Sancta Church Tel. 4622366
Anglican Church Tel.
4624853/4624811.
St. Adrem Syrian Orthodox
Church Tel. 4771751.

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

Tel. 4773111-19

PROGRAMME TWO

16:10 Cartoon — Batman
16:30 David Copper Field
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Terra Sancta Church Tel. 4622366
Anglican Church Tel.
4624853/4624811.
St. Adrem Syrian Orthodox
Church Tel. 4771751.

DEPARTURES

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
06:30 Beirut (RJ)
09:00 Warran (add) (RJ)
10:30 Frankfurt, London (RJ)
11:00 Shannon, Chicago (RJ)
12:05 Kuwait (RJ)
12:30 Cairo (RJ)
20:15 Bahrain, Doha (RJ)
20:45 Abu Dhabi, Tehran (RJ)
21:15 Dubai, Muscat (RJ)
21:20 Damascus (RJ)
22:00 Tel Aviv (RJ)
22:45 Sanaa (RJ)

Other Flights

06:00 Istanbul (TK)
07:25 Paris (AF)
09:05 London (BA)
10:30 Cairo (MS)
11:05 Istanbul (SD)
11:40 Bahrain (GF)
15:30 Vienna (OS)
15:35 Doha (QR)
16:30 Dubai (EK)
18:50 Khartoum (SD)
20:00 Beirut (ME)
23:10 Tel Aviv (LY)
02:25 Amsterdam (KL)
02:45 Athens (OA)

Royal Wings (RW)

07:00 Agaba (from Marka Airport) (RW)
08:30 Agaba (from Marka Airport) (RW)
13:30 Gaza (from Marka Airport) (RW)
20:30 Agaba (from QAIA) (RW)
22:00 Tel Aviv (from QAIA) (RW)

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre 4637111
Civil Defence Department 5661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue 4630341
Civil Defence Emergency 199
Rescue Police 192, 4621111, 4637777
Fire Brigade 4617101
Blood Bank 4775121
Highway Police 5343402
Traffic Police 4896390
Public Security Dept. 4630321
Hotel Complaints 5605800
Price Complaints 5661176
Water & Sewerage Complaints 4897467
Amman Municipality Complaints 4787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance) 121
Overseas Calls 0132
Central Amman Telephone Repairs 4623101
Abdali Tel. Repairs 5661101
Jordan Television 4773111
Radio Jordan 4774111

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery 5921199
The Islamic Abdil 5666131/7
Hussein Medical Centre 5856856
Luzmila 4630195
Khalidi Maternity 4644281/6
Akileh Maternity 4642441/2
Jabal Amman Maternity 4642362
Malhas, J. Amman 4636140
Palestine, Shmeisani 5607071
Shmeisani Hospital 5607431
Jordan Hospital 5607550
University Hospital 5353444
Al-Muasher Hospital 5667279
Al-Ahli, Abdali 5664164/6
Italian, Al-Muhajreen 4777101/3
Al-Basrah 4775111/26
Army, Marka 4891611/15
Queen Alia Hospital 5157100
Amal Hospital 5607155
Al Azmal Cancer Centre 5353000

FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA
INTERNATIONAL
AIRPORT
This information is supplied by
Royal Jordanian (RJ) information
departments at the Queen Alia
International Airport Tel.
(44)53200-5, where it should
always be verified. Information on
other flights can be supplied on
phone 44 (52700). Information on
phone 4875201-5

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
07:00 Jeddah (add) (RJ)
07:15 Sanaa (RJ)
08:30 Damascus (RJ)
08:35 Jeddah (RJ)
08:50 Dubai, Abu Dhabi (RJ)
10:05 Beirut (RJ)
10:30 New Delhi (RJ)

Other Flights

08:20 Alexandria (BA)
09:30 Cairo (MS)
10:00 Khartoum (SD)
13:20 Bahrain (GF)
14:45 Doha (QR)
15:05 Vienna (OS)
15:25 Dubai, Abu Dhabi (EK)
17:50 Istanbul (SD)
18:40 Beirut (ME)
19:15 Frankfurt (LH)
22:25 Tel Aviv (LY)
01:25 Amsterdam (KL)
01:25 Athens (OA)

Royal Wings (RW)

09:30 Agaba (arriving at QAIA) (RW)
10:10 Agaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW)
16:00 Agaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW)
10:50 Agaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW)
17:30 Gaza (arriving at QAIA) (RW)
00:15 Tel Aviv (arriving at QAIA) (RW)

Police suspect 'crime of honour' in case of slain woman

By Rana Hussein

AMMAN — Police are questioning a man and his son in connection with the suspected murder of the man's 45-year-old Iraqi wife late Friday night, according to official sources.

The victim, Manal Jalal, was reportedly shot in the early morning hours while she was sleeping, the source said, adding that her 11-year-old son confessed to shooting his mother. However, the source said police are focusing their investigation on the father and suspect a possible crime of honour.

The son informed authorities that he was playing with his father's gun at around 2:00 a.m., when a bullet was accidentally fired striking his mother's head," the source said.

But he added that the authorities are not convinced by the son's confession.

"It is possible that the father may have shot his wife himself or encouraged his son to do so," the source told the Jordan Times Sunday.

"The husband had reported his wife missing last week for four days, and had also complained to authorities that he suspected her of 'immoral behaviour,'" the source said.

The couple had been wed for 17 years. Pathologists Mo'men Hadidi and Hani Jahshan performed an autopsy on Saturday, which revealed that the woman received a sole bullet wound to the left side of her skull.

Samples of her tissues and blood were sent to the Criminal Lab for examination, the source said.

Police contacted by the Jordan Times Sunday evening said they were continuing to investigate the incident.

If proven that the woman was killed for 'immoral behaviour,' Manal will be the first woman reportedly killed in the Kingdom in the name of honour this year. Last year, officials said that more than 20 women reportedly were killed in 1998 in crimes of honour.

His Majesty King Hussein and the government are working hard to end such practices, which claim the lives of 25-30 women each year. The most recent study of honour crimes, prepared by the National Institute of Forensic Medicine, shows that the victims' average age is from 17-20, and their killers are between 20-25 years of age and most commonly are victims' brothers.

The study showed that most are killed by gunshots, followed by stabbing and strangulation. More than half of the victims in the study were married.

Parliament postpones debate on Abbadi's immunity

Abbadi alleges 'fabrication and framed accusations'

By Tareq Ayoub

AMMAN — The Lower House of Parliament on Sunday postponed the debate to lift Parliament immunity of one of its members following a war of words between lawmakers and Cabinet ministers.

Lower House deputies, who were discussing a recommendation by the Legal Committee to lift the immunity of deputy Ahmad Oweidi Al Abbadi, criticised a statement by Minister of Justice Jawdat Shoul during the debate, accusing him of "influencing" deputies' positions.

The lawmakers were debating a request by the prosecutor general to lift the immunity of Abbadi to allow authorities to interrogate the lawmaker on charges of rape.

Abbadi rejected a call by one of his colleagues to discuss the issue in a secret session and insisted that the matter be discussed publicly.

"It is a fabricated case, and I am innocent," he told his Lower House colleagues yesterday ahead of the discussion. "Everybody knows who has planted this case, and I am going to unveil their identities."

But the session turned ugly when Shoul responded to a statement by deputy Mahmoud Kharabsheh urging legislators to reject the recommendation of the Legal Committee to lift immunity.

Kharabsheh, a former intelligence officer, said the government was "hasty" in demanding that immunity be lifted. He added that the government failed to adopt the same position when the prosecutor general made a similar request in the case of three former water ministers implicated in the

water scandal that rocked the country last summer.

Kharabsheh accused "security departments" and "political opponents" of Abbadi of "masterminding the case," and lashed out at the government for its "involvement" in the case against his colleague.

The case was nothing but "fabrication and framed accusations," the deputy said.

Shoul strongly rejected Kharabsheh's statement and insisted that legal proceedings against the deputy must be implemented.

The justice minister also denied Kharabsheh's charges that "some security circles" were involved in the case and described his comments as "unfounded."

His remarks drew severe criticism from deputy Sa'ed Hayel Srour who accused the minister of

"influencing" deputies against Abbadi."

Srour, a former House speaker, demanded that Shoul's statement be scrapped from the House's minutes of deliberation.

"Lifting the immunity is a matter that concerns Parliament members alone. The government has no right to interfere or to influence the deputies' opinions by such statements," Srour told Parliament.

"We hope that the government will not exceed its constitutional limits," said the lawmaker, who addressed his words to Shoul.

Kharabsheh then threatened that if Shoul's statement was not scrapped from the minutes, he would "produce documents and evidence that prove the government's involvement in the case."

Veteran Lower House Deputy Abdul Ra'ouf

Rawabdeh urged that the justice minister's words not be scrapped, but also urged Kharabsheh to apprise the Lower House of all information that would substantiate his claims.

Minister of Interior Nayef Qadi said scrapping the statement of Shoul was not acceptable, and said his colleague did not infringe on the House's internal laws.

Rawabdeh said the atmosphere under the dome was tense and proposed that the debate be postponed: a recommendation approved by the majority.

The proposed recommendation to lift the immunity stipulates that Abbadi could be tried and interrogated but gave no right to authorities to detain him.

5,000 foreign workers rectify status in 1999

AMMAN (J.T.) — Since the start of 1999, 5,000 non-Jordanian workers have rectified their legal status and adjusted to the Ministry of Labour's requirements by acquiring work permits, according to Minister of Labour Mahdi Farhan.

Farhan said the total number of guest workers holding valid work permits has now reached 127,000 out of an unofficial estimate of 400,000 to 500,000 non-Jordanians employed in the country.

The Ministry of Labour is pursuing efforts to reorganise the local labour market and implement the government's declared policy regarding the number and type of jobs available to guest workers to pave the way for unemployed Jordanians to find employment, said the minister.

Earlier this month Prime Minister Faysal Tarawneh

announced that illegal workers who have failed to rectify their status by the end of March will be forced to leave the country.

"We will not tolerate any disregard of the existing laws. At the same time we welcome non-Jordanian workers who abide by the law and are legally employed," said the prime minister.

The Public Security Department said last December that scores of illegal foreign workers are being deported almost daily. According to Farhan, labour ministry inspectors have intensified their inspection of various organisations and companies where guest workers are presumed to be employed to ensure that they are in compliance with the law.

He said the ministry's departments are conducting inspections at 50,407 organisations that employ a

total of 82,029 non-Jordanians. The minister added that most work permits issued to foreign workers go to those employed in the agricultural sector and as domestic helpers.

Ministry sources said last month that Egyptian nationals constitute almost half of the number of guest workers in Jordan. An agreement reached by the Egyptian and Jordanian governments dictates procedures which require an Egyptian to obtain a work permit before arriving in the Kingdom.

According to the Labour Law, employers who fail to legalise their employees' status can be fined up to JD100 and the labourers may be deported at the employer's expense.

Unemployment in Jordan is officially estimated at 16 per cent and unofficially at 27 per cent.

Health ministry finalises health insurance scheme

By Suha Ma'ayeh

AMMAN — Health Minister Nayef Ajlouni said Sunday that the ministry has finalised a blueprint for a national health insurance scheme that would present more than one million Jordanians with the option to be covered by the plan.

The blueprint is part of efforts to reform the current health insurance scheme offered by the health ministry to nearly 1.2 million civil servants and their families and to those who are not covered by any insurance scheme and cannot afford to medical treatment, Ajlouni said.

"The government trying

to reform the current health insurance scheme to reduce losses incurred by the government and to broaden the scheme to make it inclusive of Jordanians who are not medically insured," he told the Jordan Times.

Ajlouni pointed out that those who wish to be covered by the plan will pay a monthly premium and at the same time pay nominal fees upon receiving treatment to limit abuse of the system.

Nearly 1.6 million military personnel and their families benefit from a medical insurance scheme introduced in 1963 by the Royal Medical Services. Nearly 400,000 people are insured by private sector

firms and institutions.

The minister pointed out that medical insurance will be basic and restricted to the country's 22 state-run hospitals and nearly 1,000 out-patient health care facilities.

"Patients who wish to be included in the scheme will receive basic medical care at governmental facilities," he said. "The ministry will share the expenses of those who wish to be treated in the private sector, but will only meet the cost equivalent to that of a government institution."

For example, he said, delivery in a private hospital costs JD100, modestly, but in Al Bashir Hospital it costs JD20. The government would therefore only

compensate JD20. "Those who are not poor, as defined by the Ministry of Social Development, and who are not medically insured, will have to pay the cost of treatment," the minister said.

Ajlouni said that 55 per cent of this not poor-not insured category who seek treatment at the ministry's hospitals will pay nominal fees which covers up to 18 per cent of the actual cost of treatment.

Poor families are defined as those who either have no salary earners and are entirely dependent on modest state assistance, or who are partly dependent on state assistance.

He said that the plan entails free coverage of an

additional 200,000 citizens who cannot afford to pay, but this segment of the scheme will be implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Development.

Meanwhile, Ajlouni said, people who seek treatment at state-run hospitals and who can afford to pay and do not wish to be covered by the scheme will be charged the full cost of treatment.

The minister stressed that an increase in the price of medical treatment that reflects the actual cost of treatment will be announced after the government offers the health insurance scheme covering the poor.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Good wishes to King Hussein continue

AMMAN (Petra) — His Majesty King Hussein on Sunday received a cable from Italian President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro congratulating him on his recovery and safe return home. The King also received congratulatory cables from Saudi Minister of Interior Prince Nayef Ben Abdul Aziz and president of the Palestinian Legislative Council, Ahmad Qureia.

Qadi opens meeting

AMMAN (Petra) — Interior Minister Nayef Qadi Sunday opened a meeting of the preparatory committees of the 16th Arab Interior Ministers' Council's session, to be held in Amman next Saturday. Qadi told the meeting the event occurs at a crucial period to ensure Arab solidarity and understanding. During the meeting, Qadi stressed the council is one of the Arab League's most successful councils. Also attending were Council Secretary General Ahmad Salem, Interior Ministry Secretary General Hashim Sabbagh and members of the participating delegations.

Khreisha meets livestock breeders

AMMAN (Petra) — Minister of Agriculture Mejhme Khreisha Sunday said the ministry is concerned about supporting farmers and livestock breeders in order to develop the agricultural sector and achieve food security. During a meeting with a delegation of farmers and livestock breeders from Mafrqa, Khreisha added that the ministry has prepared an integrated study on the Kingdom's agricultural situation in order to make a balance between available resources and required needs.

Jordanian hikes around Kingdom

AMMAN (Petra) — A Jordanian traveller arrived in Aqaba Sunday as part of his journey around the Kingdom on the occasion of His Majesty King Hussein's full recovery and safe return. Rafiq Azzam, who was received by Aqaba Governor Abdul Kareem and Malahneh yesterday, said his journey, which already has taken him to Zarqa, Ma'an, Karak and Tafila, came to express his love and gratitude to the King.

WHAT'S GOING ON

FILM

- "Pantomas" at the French Cultural Centre, Jabal Weibdeh at 6:30 p.m. and 8:30 p.m.
- "Scent of Women" at Books@Café, Jabal Amman on Tuesday Jan. 26 at 8:30 p.m. (Tel. 4650457).

EXHIBITIONS

- Exhibition of ceramics, sculpture, and abstract (plastic) art by Jordanian, Iraqi, Syrian, Lebanese, and Sudanese artists at Hammourabi Art Gallery, Gardens Street (Tel. 5536098), until Jan. 25.
- "The Warm Winter" — works by several artists at Orfali Art Gallery, Um Uthaina (Tel. 5526932), until Feb. 1.
- The Tenth Anniversary Exhibition of Contemporary Arab Artists at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh (Tel. 4643251/2), until Jan. 28.

Environmental campaign kicks off Thursday

AMMAN (Petra) — A national environmental campaign is to kick off on Thursday from the Al Hussein National Park (Wadi Qattar) led by Their Royal Highnesses Prince Faisal and Princess Alia. Engineer Nabih Riyal, director of the Haya Arts Centre, made the announcement at a press conference Sunday.

Riyal said the campaign is being launched as part of the Kingdom's celebrations of His Majesty King Hussein's recovery and safe return and is sponsored by the centre in cooperation with the Greater Amman Municipality and the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature.

He said the campaign is a translation of the King's slogan "A green Jordan by the year 2000."

Children from all governorates will be invited to take part in the campaign, whose activities will include planting of forest and fruit tree saplings.

In planting the trees, the children express their joy

over the King's return and their concern to keep the environment free of pollution and make Jordan green, according to Riyal.

He said that the concerned departments and governorates have been informed of the campaign's programme, noting that the campaign will be held in different governorates beginning on different dates, each lasting one week.

Riyal said the campaign will commence in Amman and Zarqa (Jan. 23-28), and from there will continue to Irbid and Aqaba (Jan. 30-Feb. 4), Balqa and Karak (Feb. 6-11), Mafrqa and Ma'an (Feb. 13-18), Jerash and Tafila (Feb. 20-25), and will conclude in Ajloun and Madaba (Feb. 27-March 4).

A number of organisations and ministries, including Jordan Radio and Television Corporation, and non-governmental organisations will sponsor and participate in the implementation of the campaign.

Royal Jordanian starts Shannon-Chicago route

AMMAN (J.T.) — Royal Jordanian (RJ) started last week operating flights between Ireland's Shannon Airport and Chicago using Airbus-310 planes.

An RJ official said that the selection of Shannon Airport was due to operational matters pertaining to the range of Airbus-310 planes.

He added that U.S. immigration officials at Shannon Airport can finalise procedures for passengers entering the U.S., thus facilitating travel procedures.

The sources said the operation of these flights

came ahead of the third millennium of the birth of the Christ, and that it is expected for this route to activate tourism to the Middle East by encouraging European and American travel.

The new station will also offer transport services to Irish passengers travelling to the Middle East or the Arab Gulf states via Amman, the source said.

Jordan signed an agreement with Ireland last September for operating these flights. RJ is the only Arab air-carrier operating between Shannon and Chicago.

Preference for gas over kerosene costs Kingdom JD17 million annually

AMMAN (J.T.) — The use of liquefied gas for domestic purposes, specially for heating homes, has dealt the country a JD17 million loss in 1997, said a study conducted by the 38,000-member Jordan Engineers Association (JEA).

The JEA was prompted to conduct the said study by the latest gas crisis which took many Jordanians by surprise during the Holy Month of Ramadan.

The use of liquefied gas instead of kerosene to heat homes is the cause for the loss, since local imports of liquefied gas increased while the country could have imported almost the same amount of kerosene at a lower cost.

"Jordan imported around 56,717 tonnes of liquefied gas in 1997 at an average of \$397 per tonne, while the country can consume 61,000 tonnes of kerosene at \$172 per tonne for the same purpose," said the study which was forwarded to Prime Minister Faysal Tarawneh.

The price difference between liquefied gas and kerosene was estimated by the JEA to have caused the country to lose around JD12 million. The estimate does not include the cost of transport and the cost of gas cylinders.

An increasing use of gas heaters caused an increase in demand for gas cylinders, leading the country to import 320,000 cylinders between the year 1992 and 1997, costing the country around \$1,300,000. One empty gas cylinder costs \$20.

According to the study, shipping liquefied gas from the port city of Aqaba to the country's three gas storage stations costs around \$2,100,000 annually.

"The Jordan Petroleum Refinery Company will have to double its storage capacity in order to meet the market's unexpected demands which would cost 20 times the cost of storing kerosene," said the study.

The study also warned that gas heaters are danger-

ous. "Any leakage from the gas cylinder, the pipes of the heater or the valves could cause an explosion in the house in no time," said the study.

However, an official from the Royal Scientific Society said liquefied gas is cleaner than any other fuel and hence has the least negative impact on environment. He said any misuse of gas heaters or heaters that burn kerosene also can be very dangerous if not handled carefully as the fumes can cause suffocation if the gas does not burn properly, and can also present a danger of fire since kerosene is highly flammable.

The source also said that the use of gas and kerosene heaters becomes particularly dangerous when owners misuse them.

"Every year we hear about people who suffocate in their sleep because they use their heaters at night, for example," he said.

Education ministry to provide day meals to underprivileged children

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Ministry of Education Sunday signed an agreement with the Ministry of Planning to provide school children in underdeveloped regions of Jordan with day meals.

The Ministry of Education's Secretary General Izzat Jaradat, who signed the agreement, said nearly 10,000 children, from the first to third grades, will benefit from the programme which will cover poor areas in the following districts: Deir Allah, South Shuneh, Aqaba, Ma'an, Northern Badia and Tafila.

Jaradat said the agreement

is expected to aid in boosting children's learning capabilities and in enabling them to acquire new skills.

Ministry of Planning Secretary General Abdul Razzak Bani Hani, who signed for his department, said the programme marks the commencement of projects included in the government-sponsored social safety net programme undertaken by the Ministry of Planning.

The programme will be gradually extended to cover various government schools and is expected to boost the children's psychological and physical status.

According to Bani Hani,

the programme will cost JD 773,000 this year, an amount earmarked in the social safety net's budget for this year.

Last month the government announced that the social safety net plan, to be implemented over a 10-year period is expected to cost an estimated JD698 million noting that the first phase of the plan covering the period 1998-2001 will cost JD178 million.

The programme covers less-developed regions, including the country's 13 Palestinian refugee camps and aims at modernising infrastructure services and creating jobs.

47 Indians arrested for burning Australian missionary, sons

NEW DELHI (AFP) — Police launched a manhunt Sunday for a Hindu militant in eastern India after arresting 47 other suspects for the murder of a respected Australian missionary and his two sons.

They announced a reward of 25,000 rupees (\$625) for the arrest of Dara Singh, who allegedly led the Hindu mob that burned to death Graham Stewart Staines, 58, and his sons aged seven and 10 late Friday.

The United News of India (UNI) quoted police as saying Dara Singh was a member of the Hindu militant Bajrang Dal group which is linked to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist party.

Staines, an Australian missionary working with leprosy patients in India, and his sons Philip and Timothy, were killed when a mob set fire to the car in which they were sleeping, in the eastern state of Orissa.

A resident of India for 34 years, Staines headed the Evangelical Missionary Society in the town of Baripada, Mayurbhanj district, which is populated mainly by poor tribal members.

It was the worst anti-Christian attack in the past year in India, during which the small Christian minority has suffered more than 100 assaults at the hands of

Hindu militants.

Orissa's Chief Minister J.B. Patnaik described Staines as "a symbol of Christian virtue who served people with a great missionary zeal."

"Everyone involved in this unfortunate incident will be booked," he said, and added the Australian was murdered "because he was a Christian."

Patnaik said the attackers "formed a ring around the (burning) vehicle" and did not permit Christians in the village to come to the aid of the victims.

Most attacks on Indian Christians have taken place in the Hindu nationalist-ruled western state of Gujarat. Orissa, on the east coast, is governed by the Congress, the main opposition party nationally.

Sunday's police action came as Australia despatched a diplomat to Orissa to probe the brutal murders, which drew widespread condemnation in Hindu-majority India.

In Sydney, the department of foreign affairs said Australia's consul in New Delhi, David Poulter, was travelling to Orissa to gain first-hand information about the deaths and provide support for the widowed Gladys Staines and her 13-year-old daughter.

"We are stunned by this madness," church leader Father Joseph Thomas told AFP in New Delhi. "How

long can this go on?"

Right-wing Hindu groups accuse Christian missionaries of trying to convert poor Hindus. Christians, who make up just 2.5 per cent of India's 975 million people, deny this.

Staines' wife said he had recently faced "stiff opposition from a section of the locals" for "conducting religious and social discourse" in his work with leprosy patients.

She said her family tried to get out of the blazing car but was pushed back inside by the mob.

Prime Minister Vajpayee, considered the most secular of Hindu politicians, called the attack a "ghastly act" of "anti-social elements."

Home Minister Lal Krishna Advani, a nationalist hawk, called the killings "shocking and gruesome," and urged the local government to "take stern action" against the killers.

The Communist Party of India-Marxist demanded an immediate ban on Hindu militant groups, and said the killings were the result "of the hate campaign against the Christian community" over the past year.

Christian groups have claimed a sharp rise in violence against their community since the Hindu nationalists came to office in New Delhi at the head of a multi-party coalition in March last year.



William Walker (right), head of the international ceasefire verification mission in Kosovo, waves to journalists in front of the OSCE headquarters in Pristina before departing to Vienna to meet there with OSCE leaders. Walker's expulsion from Yugoslavia was frozen three days ago by Serbian authorities after OSCE Chairman Knut Vollebæk had talks with Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic in Belgrade (AFP photo)

OSCE's Walker fears increasing Kosovo violence

PRISTINA, Serbia (R) — Kosovo seems primed for more violence despite a release of Serb hostages and ethnic Albanian prisoners, the U.S. chief of international monitors said Sunday.

Asked by Reuters if the release of detainees by both sides Saturday was a sign the Serbian province had turned a corner in the search for peace, William Walker, chief of mission for the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) said: "I wish it were, (but) I don't think so."

But Walker said reaching out to the mainstream right to form strategic alliances aimed at gaining power, while Le Pen prefers the party's current pariah status, refusing to tone down his bombastic rhetoric or make compromises for political gain.

Megret launched a takeover of the party after Le Pen, facing a court ruling barring him from running in the June poll, said his wife Jany would lead the party slate in his place.

Megret publicly challenged the move and his backers gathered the signatures of enough of the party's 40,000 dues-paying members to demand an extraordinary party congress.

Le Pen, who ultimately won the right to run in the June poll through a carefully timed appeal, retaliated by expelling Megret and his allies before they could present their petitions.

"I hope both sides understand the message from the international community that this is beyond the pale, that this is not something civilised people do."

Walker left Kosovo's capital, Pristina, Sunday for OSCE's Vienna headquarters to report on a tumultuous 10 days in Kosovo that saw him black-listed by Belgrade and then granted a reprieve even as NATO warned Belgrade of possible air strikes.

The latest round of disturbances in this southern Serb province began on Jan. 15th when the bodies of 45 ethnic Albanians, in civilian clothes, were discovered in the village of Racak after government forces swept the area.

Walker described the scene as a "massacre" and blamed the government side.

Belgrade angrily disputed his statement, saying they had been killed in a firefight between government troops and separatist rebels and the bodies then arranged to suggest a massacre.

The OSCE mission chief, who directs the actions of more than 900 international peace "verifiers" across

Kosovo, was given 48 hours by Belgrade to get out of the country — an order later rescinded under international pressure.

Amid charges and counter-charges, ethnic Albanians kidnapped five Serb civilians, including two women, north of Pristina.

Quiet diplomacy by OSCE resulted in Saturday's simultaneous release of the five Serbs and of a group of nine ethnic Albanian guerrillas captured in December.

OSCE previously had arranged the release of eight Yugoslav army soldiers captured by the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), an ethnic Albanian guerrilla force fighting for independence.

Walker acknowledged that the OSCE's mission was a fragile firebreak against a wider conflagration unless and until the warring parties subscribed to a political process that could sort out their differences.

Ninety per cent of Kosovo's roughly two million people are ethnic Albanians. Most want independence from Yugoslavia.

Megret claims leadership of French far-right

MARIGNANE, France (R) — Bruno Megret, the leader of a rebel faction of France's National Front, claimed victory Sunday in his battle to seize control of the far-right movement from its founder Jean-Marie Le Pen.

Megret, 49, who was the sole candidate to stand for president at a special party congress organised by his breakaway faction, won 86 per cent of the vote.

The approximately 2,500 delegates attending the two-day meeting in the southern town of Marignane, a Front stronghold, later named Le Pen as the party's "honorary president."

Le Pen, who is 71 years Megret's senior, boycotted the congress, dismissing it as an illegal gathering of putschists and slandering the diminutive Megret as "a psychopath" who he said fancied himself as a Napoleon.

That leaves France with two rival National Fronts, each determined to put up a slate of candidates in European parliamentary elections on June 13.

Megret backers said they would call their party the National Front-National Movement to differentiate it from Le Pen's.

Among the party's new leaders was Le Pen's daughter Marie-Caroline Le Pen, who has publicly split with her father.

Months of court battles are now likely to ensue as the rival factions fight over the right to the party's name, insignia, state campaign subsidies and sizeable headquarters building.

But the battle will above all focus on voters and the balance of forces in the French political landscape.

The mainstream right, in the minority in parliament, sees the split as a chance to win back disillusioned voters.

But recent polls show the extreme right as a whole holding on to most of its supporters despite the split, with a strong majority of front voters siding with Le Pen over Megret.

The front, denounced as racist and xenophobic by conservative French President Jacques Chirac, is Western Europe's biggest extreme-right party. It typically wins 15 per cent of the vote in national elections and often tips polls to the left by dividing the right-wing vote.

But it currently has no seats in parliament and controls only a handful of town halls.

The split centres on conflicting political strategies as well as clashing personalities.

Both Megret and Le Pen, who founded the party 25 years ago, are hard-right ideologues enraged by immigrants whom they accuse of polluting French culture and European Union, which they say is eating away at France's sovereignty.

But Megret favours reaching out to the mainstream right to form strategic alliances aimed at gaining power, while Le Pen prefers the party's current pariah status, refusing to tone down his bombastic rhetoric or make compromises for political gain.

Megret publicly challenged the move and his backers gathered the signatures of enough of the party's 40,000 dues-paying members to demand an extraordinary party congress.

Le Pen, who ultimately won the right to run in the June poll through a carefully timed appeal, retaliated by expelling Megret and his allies before they could present their petitions.

Chinese authorities detain dissident, journalist

BEIJING (AFP) — Chinese authorities have detained a dissident and a journalist in the Hunan province capital of Changsha, a rights group said Sunday.

Dissident Liu Xianbin and reporter Yuan Yajuan were taken from a guesthouse early Saturday, the New York-based Human Rights in China said in a statement received here.

Police told other members of their party who sought the release of the pair that they had no identity cards, it added.

Liu, who is from Sichuan, has been arrested at least three times in recent weeks because of his activities with the fledgling opposition China Democracy Party (CDP), the statement said. He served two-and-a-half years in jail after the 1989 Tiananmen

Square crackdown on pro-democracy students but resumed his political activities on being released, it added.

Journalist Yuan is a female reporter, the statement said, without giving further details.

The arrests followed a warning by dissidents in the same central province Friday of growing social tension caused by official corruption, heavy taxes and unemployment.

"The government should carry out political reforms to ease increasingly intense social conflict," said a letter signed by 89 CDP members.

"We urge the central government not to suppress dissidents and protesting workers, to immediately carry out political reform and to give the people a channel to

express their discontent," said the open letter, released by the Hong Kong-based Information Centre of Human Rights and Democratic Movement in China.

The activists said a rising tide of anger over increasing official corruption, heavy taxes in rural areas and unemployment would erupt if action was not taken soon.

One person died after 5,000 villagers clashed with police and army officers in a demonstration 50 kilometres west of the Hunan province capital on Jan. 8.

One thousand police were sent to restore order in the city of Ningxiang. Hunan province has been described by rights groups as one of the worst-hit by unemployment.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Yeltsin likely to remain in hospital for another week

MOSCOW (AP) — President Boris Yeltsin will remain in the hospital for at least another week while he undergoes treatment for a stomach ulcer, a news agency reported Sunday. "Doctors appraise Boris Yeltsin's health as satisfactory," presidential spokesman Dmitry Yakushkin told the ITAR-TASS news agency. "Planned therapy in progress. The president's blood pressure and temperature are in the norm." Yeltsin was admitted to the Central Clinical Hospital with a bleeding stomach ulcer on Jan. 17. His doctor, Sergei Mironov, said at the time he expected treatment of the ulcer to last for two or three weeks. It was the fifth time that the 67-year-old president has hospitalised since his reelection in 1996. Doctors decided last week that Yeltsin would not require surgery and said the medicinal treatment of his ulcer appeared to be working. The president will remain in the hospital for at least another week, ITAR-TASS said, citing unidentified sources in the Kremlin. According to Yakushkin, Yeltsin was likely to have several meetings with officials in his hospital room and speak to others by telephone. It was also possible Yeltsin could meet in the hospital with U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who arrives on a three-day visit Monday, but it was more likely that he would speak to her by telephone, ITAR-TASS said. Yakushkin said Saturday that Yeltsin had begun going over a draft of his state-of-the-union speech, and he expected the president to deliver it to parliament either in late February or early March.

Leftists, German police clash near far-right rally

MULDA, Germany (R) — Left-wing demonstrators trying to disrupt a rally by Germany's far-right NPD party clashed with police in the eastern town of Mulda Saturday evening, police said. At least one demonstrator was injured in the scuffles in Mulda, a small town of 1,400 south of Dresden. At least one car was damaged by hurled rocks and three people were detained. About 600 protesters had gathered outside a village concert hall where about 200 members of the far-right National Democratic Party was holding a party congress. There were several hundred police in the village to prevent the left-wing demonstrators clashing with members of the NPD, a party which security officials say numbers convicted neo-Nazis and skinhead thugs in its ranks. Thursday, unknown assailants had set fire to the hall, causing extensive damage. Separately, the magazine Focus said Germany's anti-extremism watchdog, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, had caught a 17-year-old who was feeding outlawed Nazi propaganda into the Internet. The youth had set up a homepage called "Der arische Ansturm" (The Aryan Onslaught) that was filled with racist propaganda as well as instructions on how to make a bomb. The magazine said police had found considerable amounts of explosives in his apartment.

French army officers rescued from South Pole after feat

PARIS (AFP) — Five French army officers who skied their way to the South Pole were rescued overnight after being stranded there since their arrival Jan. 9 due to bad weather. A plane flew in to recover the group and take them to Patriot Hills, a base used for Antarctic expeditions. From there, they will take another flight to Punta Arenas, Chile, at the beginning of the week, before flying home to France. The five men, part of an elite mountain unit in the French army, camped out at the South Pole in two tents while waiting for weather conditions to improve so the rescue plane could land. They set off for their 1,350-kilometre journey across the Antarctic ice cap on Nov. 21 from Gould Bay, near Berkner Island and covered some 30 kilometres per day. With each man towing a 130-kilogramme sledge, they skied for nearly nine hours daily in temperatures of between minus 15 and minus 25 degrees Celsius. Four of them undertook a similar expedition to the North Pole in 1996 and three of them climbed Mount Everest in 1997. The aim of the South Pole trip was to increase the personal experience of the group and test new equipment, including army underwear and rations, according to the army information service.

Dissident joins China relay hunger strike group

HONG KONG (R) — Prominent dissident Ren Wanding Sunday began a 24-hour hunger strike in Beijing in a relay-style action launched by Chinese dissidents to protest against the jailing of pro-democracy activists, a Hong Kong-based human rights group said. Other members of the banned opposition China Democratic Party will strike at the same time, the Information Centre of Human Rights and Democratic Movement in China said. The 24-hour strike continues the action started a month ago which was launched to protest against the arrests of members of the China Democratic Party last December. Dissident Xiu Wenli was sentenced to 13 years in prison and Wang Youcai to 11 years for trying to set up the opposition group to the ruling Communist Party. Qin Yongmin was jailed for 12 years. The centre said that Xu's family had received a first letter from him and would try and see him for the first time since his arrest Monday.

N. Korean soldiers kill two Chinese residents

SEOUL (R) — Two North Korean border guards shot and killed two Chinese civilians earlier this month after the soldiers crossed into China to steal goods, domestic media reported. The North Koreans had sneaked into the town across the Yalu River in mid-January, the Yonhap news agency said, quoting unidentified diplomatic sources. A group of civilians gave chase to the guards, who then opened fire, killing the two people. Yonhap said on the Internet. The report did not give a Chinese name for the town but it was believed to be near Dandong city in the northeastern province of Liaoning. Officials at South Korea's spy agency were not available for comment, and the Yonhap report gave no further details. National Intelligence Service officials said North Korean soldiers routinely cross into China in search of food and valuables. North Korea, which shares a long border with northeastern China, has suffered three years of famine which has caused many deaths and driven its population to desperate measures.

1250



United Democratic Movement (UDM) supporters take cover as shots are fired at them in the Magoda township outside Richmond. African National Congress (ANC) supporters stormed the UDM section of Richmond after eleven ANC supporters were killed overnight in an alleged revenge attack for the assassination of UDM General Secretary Sifiso Nkabinde Saturday (AFP photo)

Gunmen kill eleven in South African township

RICHMOND, South Africa (AFP) — Gunmen killed 11 members of the same family in KwaZulu-Natal at the weekend, police said Sunday, sparking fears of wanton bloodshed in the run-up to South Africa's general election.

Saturday evening's attack on the African National Congress (ANC) stronghold was apparently carried out in revenge for the murder earlier in the day of the local leader of the rival United Democratic Movement (UDM), Sifiso Nkabinde.

Seven other people were injured when gunmen opened fire around 9:00 p.m. (1900 GMT) on the house in Ndabon township, where the extended Ndabon family had gathered after a funeral, the ANC said.

The home belonged to a local ANC official, South African Radio reported. Three suspects arrested following the massacre were released after questioning Sunday. KwaZulu-Natal police director Bala Naidoo

said. Security forces patrolling around a kilometre from the house shot and killed an armed man late Saturday. The man had pointed his weapon at the patrol when challenged, according to Naidoo.

"When confronted he pointed his firearm at one of the security personnel. The security force members fired shots... killing the suspect," Naidoo said.

It was not immediately clear if he was connected with the attack. An AFP correspondent reported that police came under fire when they broke up clashes between ANC and UDM supporters on a road dividing the rival townships of Ndabon and Nkabinde's stronghold of Mogoda early Sunday.

No casualties were reported. Bloody feuding between UDM and ANC factions resulted in more than 100 killings in terror attacks in the Richmond townships last year, leading to fears of massive destabilisation in the tin-

derbox province during the campaign for the elections, due mid-year.

ANC provincial leader Bheki Cele said survivors had told him the gunmen had shouted "you killed our leader and brother" before they opened fire — an apparent reference to Nkabinde's assassination.

Cele said the ANC was angered by the police response to Saturday's massacre, saying police were called just after the shootings, but arrived two hours later.

"It is of no use to tell the people to remain calm when they know that police will not do anything to protect them from another attack," he said. Nkabinde, the local leader of the UDM and its national general secretary, was gunned down on Saturday morning.

The region's most feared politician, Nkabinde was acquitted last year of 16 charges of murder — for lack of evidence — though ANC leaders considered him a warlord and behind much of the violence in the province, where politically motivated killings are rife.

His organisational skills and intimidatory tactics were credited with giving the fledgling UDM a foothold in KwaZulu-Natal, previously the scene of a bloody low-level civil war between the ANC and the Inkatha Freedom Party.

Nationally, a recent opinion poll gave the UDM only three per cent of voters' support, trailing behind four other parties.

Richmond Mayor Andrew Ragavaloo said Sunday the small town was in shock at the killings. "We did expect some retaliation after Nkabinde's killing but not as bad as what we have seen here," said Ragavaloo during a visit to the Ndabon township.

"The community is devastated. We have had peace for five months and suddenly this killing. We hope this doesn't lead to another spiral of violence," he told the South African Press Association.

Candidacy rows rock Nigerian parties amid presidential race

LAGOS (AFP) — Splits have appeared in Nigeria's second largest party, while conservatives in the north have threatened a disruptive entry into the country's presidential race, just over a month before elections.

The centre-right All Peoples Party (APP), which came second in state elections held earlier this month, is split over plans for an electoral pact for the presidential elections slated for Feb. 27, a top party official admitted Sunday.

The leaders of the APP agreed earlier this month to team up for the presidential elections, presenting a joint candidate with the regional Alliance for Democracy (AD).

But last week the AD made clear that, though smaller than the centre-right party, it expected to be allowed to produce the alliance's candidate for president.

And Friday, five leading members of the APP, all hopefuls for the APP ticket to lead Africa's most populous country, issued a state-

ment insisting that the alliance's candidate must come from the APP.

"The APP is now saying that as a senior partner in the alliance, there is no way the APP as a party can accept that the AD should produce the presidential candidate," said newspaper publisher Emmanuel Iwanya, a spokesman for the five.

"The APP will definitely not accept that," he added.

The problem for other leaders in the APP is that to secure the support of the Yoruba-based AD, which most analysts believe would be vital for the APP to stand a chance of winning in the elections, defeating the dominant centre-left Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), they must agree to an AD candidate.

"Some of our presidential aspirants do not agree with what we are doing," a top APP official admitted Sunday, speaking on condition of anonymity, acknowledging "internal problems" within the party.

The problems were to be discussed Sunday and Monday and he expected them to be resolved soon, he said.

Meanwhile, a conservative northern group meeting in Kaduna at the weekend threatened a divisive entry into the election race saying it would back a northern candidate in a challenge to southern demands that the south at last produce a president.

"In about a week's time, a prominent son from the north will declare his interest for the presidency," the group, the Northern Elders Forum, said in a statement a copy of which was received by AFP Sunday.

The group said the debate among southern politicians about who should stand for the presidency "is already developing into a crisis situation."

To resolve this, it said it would back the northern candidate.

Nigeria's conservative northern elite has dominated the country since independence in 1960 and in

1993, the election of a southern tycoon and politician, Mushood Abiola, was overturned by the northern military, enflaming passions in his native south-west.

Since then, a consensus has grown that the three registered parties must accept demands that the south produce the next president.

Joseph Wayas, a leading member of the forum who opposed the northern body's decision, warned Sunday that it risked plunging Nigeria into "crisis" by infuriating the already tense south.

"We should equally not forget what brought us to this stage of political crisis," he said, referring to the annulment of the 1993 elections. "We should not forget that we may precipitate another crisis, similar to the June 12 (1993) crisis," he said.

The deadline for nominations for the Feb. 27 election is Feb. 12. Up to 53 million people are expected to vote.

Myanmar arrests dissidents, opposition activists

YANGON (R) — Myanmar has arrested members of the main opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) and an exiled anti-government group for allegedly inciting student riots in November and December 1998, the official Myanmar News Agency (MNA) reported Sunday.

The agency did not say how many people had been arrested, but it published photographs of 11 persons said to be held by the country's military rulers.

It identified the exiled group as the People's

Defence Force (PDF), formed in 1990, and based along the Thai border.

"The authorities concerned have exposed the case of the anti-government elements who dropped and distributed investigative pamphlets in the toilets of the Institute of Medicine 2, on buses and at bus stops and public parks... during November and December 1998," the news agency said.

During November and December of last year some students at medical colleges in Yangon were reported to

have staged anti-government protests, although the protests did not spread and were contained by the authorities.

The NLD, led by Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, has long been at loggerheads with the ruling State Peace and Development Council over demands for democratic reform and human rights.

The agency said an organiser of the PDF, Khin Soe, was detained while carrying pamphlets on Dec. 22, 1998. At the same time a number of NLD members

were also picked up allegedly doing the same thing.

The PDF had collaborated with the armed rebel Karen National Union (KNU) group based along the border with Thailand, the agency added. The KNU is fighting the military government in its quest for an independent Karen state in Myanmar.

The news agency reported that legal action would be taken against those held for what it called creating public confusion and disturbing the peace.

Program Administrator / Grants Manager Position

A US consulting firm in Amman, Jordan is seeking a Program Administrator / Grants Manager to begin as soon as possible for an assignment of approximately two years and 9 months. The successful candidate will possess a wide range of skills and experience including, but not limited to the following:

- Soliciting, competing, awarding, disbursing, administering, and monitoring of grants totaling more than \$5 million to at least seven beneficiaries.
- High degree of computer skills, including network systems administration, computerized monitoring and evaluation systems, and database development and maintenance.
- Professional and personal support to eight long-term expatriate employees and nearly 500 person months of short-term consultants.
- Compliance with US and Jordanian laws and USAID regulations and policies governing contracting, procurement, and grants.
- Financial oversight of project and grantee finances.
- Oversight of project procurement and inventory management for the project and for grantees.
- Monitoring and management of local subcontract(s); and
- Financial and technical reporting on quarterly and annual basis.

Candidates must possess the following qualifications:

- At least ten years of work experience directly related to the duties and responsibilities listed, including eight year's experience managing international development projects with both for-profit contractors and grantees.
- Solid understanding of computers and local area networks, including experience in network systems administration, computerized monitoring and evaluation systems, database development and maintenance, and experience with Microsoft Project, Microsoft Access, Microsoft Excel and Corel Quattro Pro.
- Prior extensive experience with USAID rules and regulations concerning management of projects and procurement.
- At least a BA or equivalent in business administration, economics, or a related field; and
- Strong written and oral communication skills in English.

Please send CV and cover letter by fax to 560-3599 attn: Program Administrator / Grants Manager position. Dead line for receipt of applications Thursday, February 4th, 1999

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2-day weekend?

THE CABINET on Saturday took up the issue once again of a two-day weekend after preparing the groundwork by soliciting a set of related proposals and counterproposals. The issue has long been under consideration, with submissions for and against it appearing about equal. There are obviously strong arguments in favour of an extended weekend and equally persuasive arguments against it. There are already several institutions which observe the two-day weekend, and the results of this practice must have been available to the government. Universities and schools follow a two-day weekend, while the government enjoys a one-and-a-half-day weekend.

The major considerations in deciding whether or not to opt for an extended weekend remain the same: Which of two days to choose, and what will be the economic and social impact of Jordan taking two days off per week. How will the country's high rate of unemployment be affected. Jordan's contacts with the outside world, be they with Arab countries or foreign nations, is a factor that has bounced back and forth with no resolution. Most countries following a two-day weekend make available abundant recreational and cultural facilities that people can avail themselves of so that a weekend is what it should be a time for rest, relaxation and enjoyment.

That so much time has already been invested in studying the issue certainly indicates that Jordan's move to two days off per week is inevitable. Wouldn't more time devoted to development of public recreational and cultural facilities for adults and children be time better spent?

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Ra'i's Ahmad Musleh said that yesterday's Arab foreign ministers' meeting became possible only after a series of preparatory meetings in Cairo, talks between the Arab League secretary general and the Iraqi foreign minister and a number of contacts and visits from other officials, all of which revealed how important the meeting was. A unified official Arab stand to answer the Arab Nation's questions about its present and future is a must, especially with Israel ignoring the peace process and the Iraq crisis, he said. However, the writer added, although sixteen Arab countries agreed to the conference, the event was delayed because of criticisms concentrating on the preparations in order to ensure the meeting's success.

Al Dustour's Ahmad Hesban said that more than 1 million cubic metres of freshwater, considered to be of the highest quality in the world, is currently being used to irrigate 100,000 dunums rented by four companies in the south of Jordan. Although the Kingdom is in need of drinking water, it is obvious that certain agricultural firms are abusing huge amounts of water to produce a few crops: crops which could be imported for a cost much lower than the cost of the water used for irrigation, Hesban claimed. According to the writer, although the licences given to the companies stipulated that they only be allowed to produce wheat and fodder as well as breed livestock to produce meat, the companies are currently producing potatoes, apples and other crops. Thus, in order to protect the scarce resource of water, the government now has the right to cancel the licences and end this abuse of water, as the companies are no longer operating in accordance with the terms of the licences, said Hesban.

Privatising the private sector

Economic Review



Dr. Yusuf Mansur

Prize for its development. However, there are two caveats that one should be aware of: the portfolio approach while reducing the possibility of bankruptcy always generates less profits, and it applies only to investments in stocks, not direct investment. So on the outset, going the conglomerate way generates fewer profits. Moreover, this approach, when applied to the creation of unrelated businesses, reduces the possibility of creating value added as huge investments go the horizontal route creating low value added, less competitive products that can barely compete in a protected environment never mind the global village. High tech, know-how intensive products made more

efficiently in Jordan than elsewhere are what brings about a competitive advantage to the economy. On the other hand, investment funds that are wasted on many small unrelated ventures tend to create very little value added and do not make for quality or high standard products that can be exported to wealthy, stable non-regional markets.

Good antitrust legislation can lead to the removal of many of the monopolistic practices of the family conglomerates. But this is not enough to stop the growth of such managerial structures. Other changes must take place such as opening the domestic market, which guarantees that local monopoly profits are diminished and spurs investors to increase value added: prohibition of cross subsidies from own-banking ventures to own-business firms; and improving standards and encouraging the adoption of high standards to encourage the creation of strategic management and planning by firms. This recipe will lead to the creation of singular highly specialised firms that are publicly held companies. It need not be carried out by the public sector; privatisation of the private sector is an imminent market reality that will soon close in.

RECENTLY, DR. ALI Lutfi, an economics professor and former prime minister of Egypt made the observation that the private sector in Egypt, because of the prevalent family business approach to ownership, was not contributing sufficiently toward the growth of the Egyptian economy. He noted that family businesses have been diversifying into business activities that are totally unrelated to their original economic activity. For example, manufacturing firms owned by families diversified into real estate investment through bank loans secured sometimes through family ownership or family presence at the board of directors of the lending institute. His complaint was that such activities were not increasing the exports of the nation and thus did not contribute sufficiently toward the GDP.

A privatisation expert made a similar remark almost two years ago about the private sector in Jordan. He probably did not mean exactly what Dr. Lutfi observed but he was actually referring to the prevalence of monopolistic practices in the economy. Yet, upon close examination the Jordanian economy suffers from the same malady. Empirical research by Professor Nasim Barham of

University of Jordan on the profile of the Jordanian entrepreneur noted that families in Jordan tend to behave as conglomerates and wander off into completely unrelated business endeavours. A venture capital expert made the remark that the "families" also own some of the banks that tend to lead to their ventures. Therefore, the statement of Dr. Lutfi fits Jordan as well.

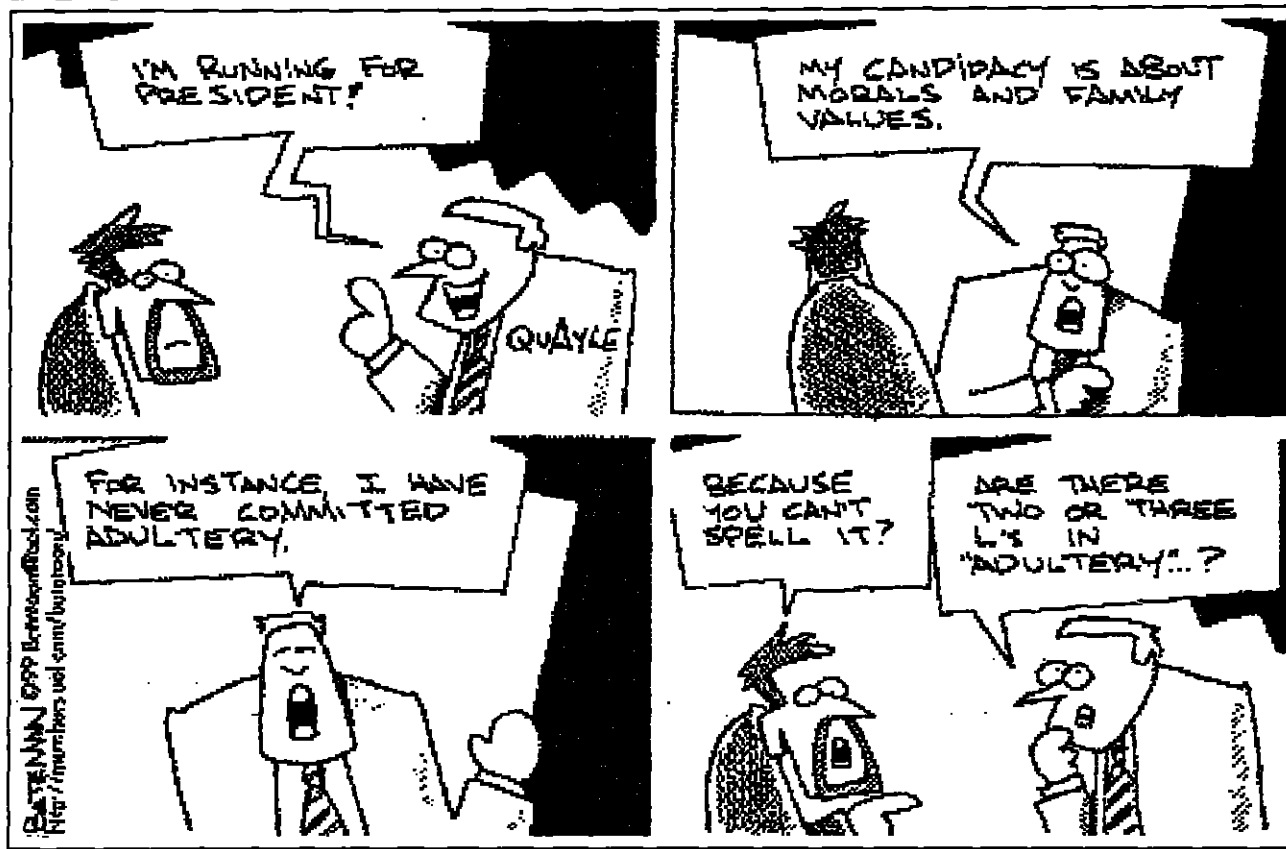
Families have more incentive than single investors to go the conglomerate way. For one thing, the family, unlike the single entrepreneur, seeks managerial employment opportunities for most of its members to ensure the loyalty of the agent (operator). Having one business means one top job and many middle positions that can be staffed by professionals. Therefore, a family-style investment tends to be diversified. Second, families behave as a risk-averse stockbroker in order to satisfy the whims of their many leaders.

Third, most family investments arise from agrarian or nomadic societies where the clan is traditionally the employer, protector, and banker: continuing the tradition is easy as witnessed in the case of many of the Jordanian families who moved from being

powerful clans to business clans that deal internally and unite against competitors who also come with their own form of family investments. In addition, conglomerates may arise because of an inherent belief that the economy is unstable and the best way of doing business is to grab whatever opportunities come one's way, such as supplying a government contract or satisfying a bid or riding a real estate investment craze.

Furthermore, the lack of specialisation and actual competition from domestic or foreign firms make it easy to enter into different markets without specialised capital, labour, management skills or know-how; thus making diversification not only costless but also harmless.

Nevertheless, why is this wandering so bad? Alternatively, as bright young student at Al Hashemiah University noted after a lecture on competitiveness, "Does not investment theory prescribe portfolio diversification in order to reduce risk?" Investment theory actually prescribes that one does not put all the eggs in one basket — that is how the father of this theory (the Capital Asset Pricing Model) James Tobin described it on the eve of being told that he received the Nobel



This flawed peace between the Palestinians and Israel

By Pascal B. Karmy

WHEN THE Oslo accord was published to the world after long secret negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis in Oslo with the mediation of Norway, I wrote an article about it in the Jordan Times, September 20, 1993. In that article, I described the advantages and disadvantages of the accord and stated among other things the following: "It cannot, however, be denied that there are some negative elements in the agreement as far as the Palestinians and the Arabs are concerned. Those elements concern the question of Jerusalem, the settlements and the refugees which will be negotiated at the beginning of the third year of the interim period (see article V of the accord and article IV of the Annexes under the title "specific understandings and agreements"). There are no specific indications on what basis negotiations will be undertaken."

I also stated: "If no deal is concluded now with Israel the latter will in five or ten years, fill the occupied territory with settlements to a degree that there will be no territory to negotiate about and the Palestinians will be choked and become at best 'carriers of water and hewers of wood' to the Jews or at worst they will be forced out of their homes. This indeed was the Likud policy when it was in power and it had reluctantly started negotiations under U.S. pressure but with the intention of dragging the negotiations, as frankly admitted by Shamir (after his resignation), so as to overwhelm the occupied territories with more settlements."

Dr. Hanan Ashrawi, one of the chief Palestinian negotiators in Madrid and Washington prior to the Oslo accord of which she almost knew nothing, wrote in her book titled "This Side of Peace" published in 1995, the following addressing Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen): "It is clear that the ones who initiated this agreement have not lived under occupation. You

postponed the settlements issue and Jerusalem without even getting guarantees that Israel would not continue to create facts on the ground that would pre-empt and pre-judge the final outcome."

Abu Mazen answered: "All these will be negotiated. We got strategic political gains, particularly the fact that this is an agreement with the PLO and not just a Palestinian delegation and the recognition of the Palestinians as a people with political rights."

Dr. Ashrawi retorted that: "My main concern is about substance. I think the agreement has many potentially explosive areas and could be to our disadvantage. At least you should have done something about Jerusalem, the settlements and human rights. Strategic issues are fine, but we know the Israelis and we know that they will exploit their power as occupier to the hilt, and by the time you get to permanent status, Israel would have permanently altered realities on the ground."

Abu Mazen answered: "You can negotiate settlements and human rights. Talk to them directly in Washington and ask for a freeze on settlement activities, the release of prisoners, the lifting of the Jerusalem siege and the return of the deportees."

Dr. Ashrawi was amazed and answered: "After you had signed? What power do we have? Do you want me to talk to the Israelis as a petitioner?"

What I am driving at from the above quotations is to show that one of the main defects in the Oslo accord and even in the subsequent accords including the Wye River accord of October 23, 1998, is that there exists no mention at all about stopping settlements building or having them stalled until the final status negotiations. There is one provision in the Oslo accord of 1993 to the effect that no party shall take any action which pre-empt the final status negotiations. But this provision did not prevent Israel from

building settlements until this day.

The argument by Abu Mazen that the settlements' issue (together with Jerusalem, the refugees and the boundaries) could be negotiated does not hold water as Israel, despite the Palestinian National Authority's incessant protests, has continued to enlarge old settlements and construct new ones. It has thus built a settlement in Ras Al Amoud, the heart of the Arab part of Jerusalem, and is on the verge of building settlements in Abu Ghneim in the east part of Jerusalem, let alone others spread across the West Bank after confiscation of Palestinian lands.

It is indeed amazing, as Dr. Ashrawi writes, that the settlements' issue was not seriously tackled by Arafat in all the negotiations with the Israelis. I agree with Dr. Ashrawi when she says in her above-quoted book: "It would be wrong and misleading to try to beautify such a flawed agreement and to embellish it in such a way as to create exaggerated expectations. It certainly was not the answer to our prayers nor an airtight or comprehensive agreement capable of easy implementation." Time has shown that Dr. Ashrawi was deadly right.

The writer was an advocate in Palestine in 1944 and, for many years, legal officer at UNRWA headquarters in Beirut and Vienna.

LETTERS

Welcome back

To the Editor:

I AM a Jordanian woman living in Austin, Texas. I can't describe my feelings when I saw His Majesty's return, the Royal family waiting for him. I was so happy, and the feeling was so overwhelming that I wished, I was there to welcome him in person. Maybe I am just an ordinary woman, but His Majesty's gestures makes every one of us, every Jordanian, and every Arab feel special. So on behalf of my family in Jordan and my family in the States I want to wish His Majesty all the best and happy return.

Manal Saleh
 Austin
 U.S.

The Arab male mind

To the Editor:

I AM a Jordanian-born female currently residing in Sydney, where I have lived for the past 12 years. I recently came across numerous articles, particularly in TIME magazine discussing "honour killings" in Jordan. The articles became of interest to me, as they discussed how traditional male thinking of Arabs and Jordanians has not changed. The articles further went on to discuss the crimes committed against women that fell under the category of honour killings, and how the Jordanian legal system often condones the increasing number of these horrific crimes.

I found it particularly interesting as such Arab male thinking is no different when living in a Western culture. The practice of 'psychological oppression' continues and acts as a reminder to females, that if we wander astray from our traditions, consequences will be deadly — literally.

Lubna Haddad
 Sydney
 Australia

To the women of Jordan

To the Editor:

I SAW the 20/20 show on TV yesterday on CNN about honour killings of family members, young women killed by their brothers and fathers. God bless the women of Jordan and may they one day be free from this horrible outdated custom.

Herman
 Canada

Action is needed now!

To the Editor:

FIRST OF all, my congratulations to Rana Hussein on her courage and steadfastness in bringing crimes against Jordanian women to light.

It was with a combination of shock, sorrow and disgust that we watched in horror one news report after another about the so-called "Honour Killings" in Jordan. The next day at work people, knowing that I lived in Jordan for seven years, bombarded me with questions regarding the horrific subject. Frankly, I am speechless! First of all, I have never heard of it while we lived there (82-89). Was I so out of touch that I missed it or was it done "behind closed doors" back then? Secondly, I don't know what I find most repulsive: the way male relatives murder their own sisters in cold blood or the government's indifference to the problem! I almost fell out of my chair when I heard the women, who fear their male relatives, VICTIMS are in jail by the Jordanian government for safety. Excuse me! That is the most pathetic and absurd thing I have ever heard. I'd like to know why the international human rights organisations are turning a deaf ear on these desperate women.

Talking and writing about this atrocity is a good start, but I believe that action to start treating and judging the men who commit these crimes as the first degree MURDERERS that they are, as well as to PROTECT the victims they DESERVE to be protected, is needed AS SOON AS POSSIBLE!

Marina Sanchez
 p.m.

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(Continued from pa

On Saturday, the U.S. Navy's USS Zumwalt (DDG 1000) was launched in the Pacific. The ship is the first of its kind, a Zumwalt-class guided missile destroyer. It is the most advanced warship ever built, with stealth technology and advanced weapons. The ship is named after the late Admiral Zumwalt. The launch ceremony was held in the Pacific. The ship is expected to be commissioned in the near future. The ship is the first of its kind, a Zumwalt-class guided missile destroyer. It is the most advanced warship ever built, with stealth technology and advanced weapons. The ship is named after the late Admiral Zumwalt. The launch ceremony was held in the Pacific. The ship is expected to be commissioned in the near future.

Tell el-'Umayri excavations, surveys anchor the Madaba Plains Project — part III

(Note: This is the last of three articles on the excavations at Tell el-'Umayri and associated surveys and smaller excavations within the context of the Madaba Plains Project. Today's article looks at the Classical period and later sites, and the results of regional surveys and excavations; the second article concentrated on the important Iron Age towns at the site, while the first article focused on the earliest Bronze Age towns.)

THE SITE of Tell el-'Umayri actually comprises three different tells, located within about 250 metres of one another. The main excavated site is the western tell, the largest of the three (some seven hectares) and the one closest to the ancient local water source. It is located immediately west of the airport highway, eleven kilometres south of the Seventh Circle in Amman. It is slightly higher than the other two tells, its summit being some 60 metres above the wadi bed, and 900 metres above sea level.

Across the highway from the main tell is a smaller site known as el-'Umayri East, with trees and wall lines clearly visible on it as one drives by on the airport highway. This is the site of the Classical period settlement, with Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine remains, but it has never been excavated. A survey in 1994 identified 43 different ancient features on 'Umayri East, including 11 cisterns, 22 caves, ten quarries, mosaic floor remains, a Byzantine cross carved on a stone, and coins dating from the Umayyad and Ottoman periods. A 94-metre-long north-south wall and a 62-metre-long east-west wall on the hill seem to be recent constructions.

The third tell is 'Umayri North, located east of the highway, north of the Classical site, and north-east of the main site. It is the latest of the three in terms of settlement, having been used primarily in the Islamic period, according to pottery and coin evidence collected from the surface. It has never been excavated.

Regional Survey

The hinterland survey of an area of five kilometres radius around Tell el-'Umayri identified 133 new sites, indicating the archaeological wealth of this area that is now being heavily and rapidly built up. Among the ancient sites were roads, houses, towns and villages, wine presses, cisterns, caves, lime kilns, watchtowers and forts — spanning the entire known history of humankind, from the Stone Age to the Islamic era. The survey was directed by Dr. Sten LaBianca of Andrews University, assisted initially by the late Robert G. Boling, and subsequently by Randall W. Younker and Gary L. Christopher. The hinterland surveying sought to undertake a controlled comparison of food system cycles in the 'Umayri region with those already documented around Hisban, LaBianca said in a recent interview. "This was a new type of survey using random sampling methods, along with traditional approaches. Special attention was focused on evidence of change over time in food production practices and related settlement patterns," he explained.

The survey consisted of several teams, including an environmental survey team; a random survey team; a site survey team; a seasonal site survey

team; a tomb survey team; an ethnographic team; and a water resources survey team, which were not all fielded during the same season.

The picture that emerges from the survey evidence is of a region of numerous farming estates that concentrated on growing grains and fruits (particularly grapes for wine production). Among the ancient farming technologies that have been documented are dams and embankments along the bottoms of wadis in order to minimise erosion and maximise the retention of groundwater for dryland cultivation — a practice that contemporary farmers are starting to employ again. Among the significant results of the regional survey, according to LaBianca, was that "pottery from the Roman and Byzantine periods, and to a lesser extent from the Iron Age II, was found on the surface of the ground throughout the entire project area, even in fields and hillsides."

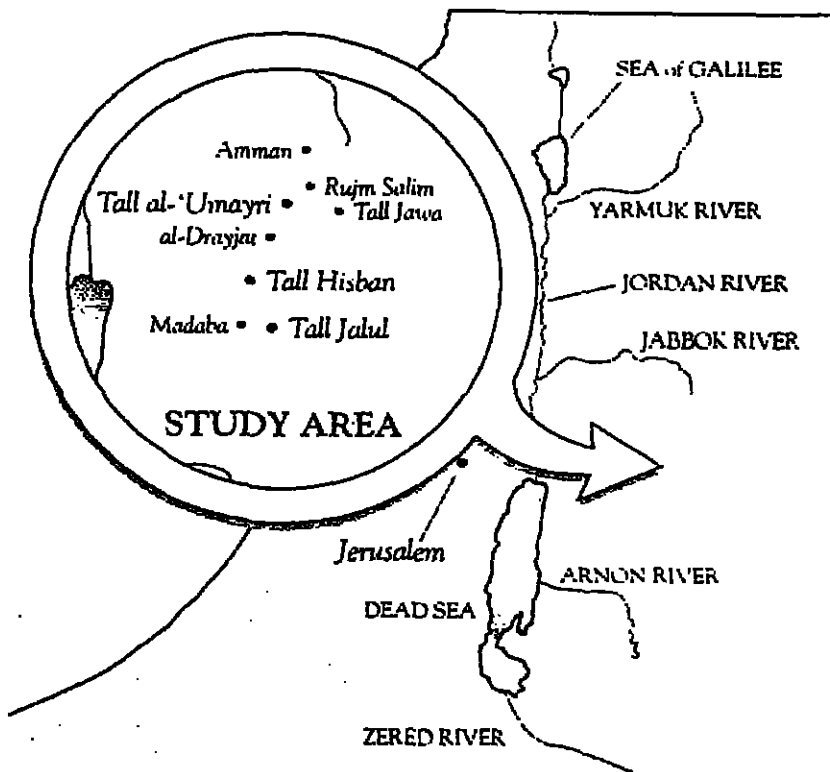
This reflects the findings of other surveys in adjacent areas that show these to have been the ancient periods of most intensive human activity. The survey identified four general categories of buildings that were found throughout the survey area during the periods of heaviest human use: agricultural field shelters or 'towers', small farmsteads, larger agricultural complexes or 'estates' (such as Rujm Salim, described below), and forts (such as ed-Dreijat). The common agricultural field shelters or 'towers' are 3.5-metre-square or rectangular solitary facilities located well away from the main farmsteads, and always associated with agricultural terraces and/or field walls. They probably provided temporary shelter for farmers or workers during critical seasons, when the crops had to be carefully watched or protected.

The larger field 'towers' (3x3 to 6x7 metres) were usually associated with facilities for cultivating, storing, preparing or processing foodstuffs, including wine presses, millstones, field walls, and caves. They usually were located on spurs of hills overlooking good agricultural fields and vineyards, and probably were used primarily as watchtowers and farmsteads.

Such a facility is perhaps described in the biblical passage of Isaiah 5:1-7: "My beloved had a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. As he dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines, he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it." Most of these agricultural facilities described in the Isaiah passage were found throughout the survey area, including stone piles from field clearing, wine presses, enclosure walls, and towers, said Dr. Larry Herr of Canadian University College.

Ed-Dreijat Excavation

One of the outlying sites that the MPP team excavated was a hilltop settlement called Ed-Dreijat, located nearly two kilometres to the south-west of 'Umayri itself. Its hilltop location with fine views in all directions suggested that it was an Iron Age military fortress or tower: the excavations confirmed its early life as a fort in the Iron II period, but also revealed a more complex history spanning several periods. Excavations revealed that the main rectangular



Map of the study area

lar structure had walls measuring some 2.5-metres thick, built of massive chert boulders measuring over two metres long in some cases. The oldest use was during the Iron II period, when it seems to have protected the surrounding farming region. The site was cleared to bedrock and rebuilt in the Late Persian/Hellenistic era as a complex that included

domestic quarters and agricultural processing facilities. Some of the architectural changes included new basements carved into the bedrock, and caves tunnelled beneath the fortress for storage of water and food.

The structure was again remodelled during its use in the Late Hellenistic and Roman periods, and pot-shards from the Byzantine period may

reflect the site's use for agricultural purposes. Light pottery remains suggest perhaps only seasonal use in the Ayyubid-Mamluke era, according to Dr. Randall Younker of Andrews University, who directed these excavations.

Rujm Salim

Another of the sites discovered during the regional survey and subsequently excavated was a large farmstead or estate called Rujm Salim, over two kilometres north-east of Tell el-'Umayri. It comprised a tower-like central building nearly nine metres square and made of megalithic stones, along with terraces, enclosure walls, cisterns, wine presses, caves, 'out' buildings near the main structure, 'roads' among the agricultural fields, and other structures. An ancient proper road passes nearby.

This facility seems to have been built around the 6th-5th century BC, when it probably served as some sort of managerial complex to oversee the vineyards and wine production in the region. Another similar site was excavated some two kilometres south of Tell el-'Umayri. Among the objects found at Rujm Salim that indicated that it and other similar sites were more than just large farmsteads were many fragments of jewellery and figurines, a scaraboid seal, and two stamp seals. One of the interesting finds from Rujm Salim was a deliberately defaced bronze coin from the 3rd century BC, during the structure's second period of use in the Hellenistic era. Rujm Miriam is a fourth survey site that was excavated to reveal a food production and processing facility overlooking the upper reaches of the Wadi Bunayit. This farmstead comprised a central house surrounded by a courtyard, walls, and terraces. It was built, used and abandoned during the Hellenistic period (332-63 BC), and may have served primarily as a collection point for agricultural produce.

Work on tombs

The regional survey identified numerous tomb remains in the vicinity of Tell el-'Umayri, with 42 survey sites showing the remains of cemeteries or isolated burials. Of these, 30 sites had Roman-Byzantine remains. Several cemeteries or individual tombs have been excavated or cleared, revealing well preserved burials from the Early Bronze Age IV period (c. 2300-2000 BC), including shaft tombs and cistern-shaped installations.

The excavations of one cemetery two kilometres from the tell showed that the people were buried with funerary objects such as four-spouted lamps, jugs, bronze daggers, and spindle whorls — perhaps standard requirements for a safe journey through the next life in the late 3rd millennium BC. Cistern-like structures adjacent to the shaft tombs had EBIV and Middle Bronze IIA materials. Project members have hypothesised that a settlement was located nearby, or — because the cisterns were located amidst the tombs — that the cemetery itself was a seasonal campsite and settlement for pastoralists who returned here regularly to bury their dead. The survey of the 'cemetery' area, measuring 500 x 400 metres, revealed twice as many cistern-shaped features as tombs, suggesting that it would be inaccurate to



By Rami G. Khouri

designate this primarily as a cemetery, according to Douglas R. Clark of Walla Walla College, and an MPP co-director.

These are among the richest funerary remains from this period excavated anywhere in the southern Levant, according to Gary Christopherson and Boguslaw Dabrowski, who have made a separate analysis of the tomb remains.

Along with the dolmen that was excavated on the south slope of the tell, the project also identified on the south-eastern slope a hewn cave or tomb with a stepped entrance, dating from the Middle Bronze IIC period (1650-1550 BC). This tomb would have been used by the people who first built the massive fortifications at the hilltop town. It housed 15 articulated skeletons, including one placed in a niche and four children. Typical funerary objects were plectrums, carinated bowls, jugs, juglets, and lamps.

The environmental survey focused on documenting the land use strategies of Roman and Byzantine era inhabitants of Wadi Bishara, about two kilometres west of the tell. Among the features studied were earth embankments set perpendicular to the wadi bottom, terraces that rose from the wadi, and diversion dams and embankments on smaller tributaries — some of which were being revived by farmers today. "When this ancient system was at its peak," LaBianca said, "the wadi and the surrounding slopes could have produced ten times as much vegetables and fruits as are being grown today."

The ethnographic survey studies contemporary human lifestyles and beliefs in order to illuminate the past. It has sought to document the reasons why households and villages made the decision to become sedentary or nomadic. Interviews with three groups of local residents ('Ajameh natives, Christians who came here a century ago, and recently arrived Palestinians) have identified some of the reasons for this changing lifestyle. These include shifting from tent homes in summer to warmer caves or houses in winter; simultaneously cultivating crops and herding animals on tribal lands separately dedicated for each purpose; the existence of a range of families, within a tribe, on the continuum from sedentary to fully nomadic; and flexible tribal norms that allow members to be included or excluded, as circumstances demand.

The work at Tell el-'Umayri and associated sites in the Madaba Plains Project (MPP) is continuing, with excavations taking place every other summer. The MPP is sponsored by Andrews University (Michigan, USA), in consortium with Canadian University College, LaSierra University, and Walla Walla College. The Tell el-'Umayri Project is directed by Larry G. Herr, Douglas R. Clark, and Warren C. Trenchard, with LaSierra University President and former MPP director Lawrence Geraty acting as senior consultant.



An Iron Age/Persian era winepress from one of the many sites in the survey area (photo by Rami G. Khouri)

Iraq boosting southern defences, governor says

(Continued from page 1)

On Saturday, the official INA news agency in Baghdad reported that Iraq had officially protested to the U.N. Security Council regarding the no-fly zones, which are enforced over northern and southern Iraq by British and U.S. warplanes.

Allied aircraft were responsible for a total of 9,428 aggressive air violations between August 1998 and the end of 1998, including 1,286 in northern Iraq, Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammad Said Al-Sahhaf said in a letter to the Security Council, the agency reported.

The British and U.S. overflights constitute "unjustified violations of Iraqi sovereignty," Sahhaf said.

The no-fly zones, imposed after the 1991 Gulf war to protect Iraq's Kurdish and Shiite Muslim populations, extend north of the 36th Parallel and up to the 33rd Parallel in the south, reaching the outskirts of Baghdad. Baghdad has never recognised the zones, which do not have the backing of a specific U.N. resolution, and has pledged to defy them.

On Saturday, the Pentagon reported that U.S. forces that day attacked an Iraqi missile site. Residents in Basra said sirens regularly go off in the city to warn citizens that planes are over the no-fly zone.

There seemed to be little movement of military hardware on one of the two main highways to the south on Sunday. The previous day,

the second route nearer the Iranian border also seemed quiet.

"Regarding Kuwait, they are our neighbours. If we wanted to take Kuwait, we could take Kuwait in one night and a day despite the presence of Americans now, or others," he said, but added Iraq had no units close to the border and was not a threat.

"We did not threaten anyone, and we will not threaten anyone," the governor said, accusing the Kuwaiti government of stirring up fears of an Iraqi threat.

Iraqi officials have lambasted Kuwait for allowing U.S. and British warplanes to use its bases during raids launched on Iraq in December and to for patrolling the no-fly zone.

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Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

The stock exchange is still suffering from shortage of liquidity despite improvement of indicators

**** DESPITE SOME** improvement in the indicators of the stock market, known as the Amman Financial Market (AFM), the bourse still suffers from low liquidity, the AFM's deputy director-general said in a working paper he presented to a conference held recently at the Yarmouk University in Irbid. He pointed out that the turnover ratio has declined to around 10 per cent after peaking at 86.2 per cent in 1992 and standing at about 50 per cent in 1998, noting that the depth of the market and its liquidity are considered among the important factors that influence decisions for investment in the market.

Jalil Tareef, the senior AFM official, wrote that the supply of shares, especially the "free float" shares has an important effect on the market development through providing more depth and liquidity in the market and enabling it to carry out the role of attracting foreign investments which flow mostly to countries outside this region. "Despite the existence of Arab financial markets having a market value of around JD150 billion, these markets were not able to attract adequate foreign investments," he said.

Tareef added that within this framework, it is imperative to expand the sale of shares owned by the government to increase the supply of shares, especially the free float shares. Moreover, he said, it is imperative to expedite the privatisation programmes and to remove the restrictions and barriers or ceilings facing investment.

In his working paper, the deputy director general said the AFM has

depended on shares as a main trading tool since it was established whereas stocks received less attention whether in terms of trading volume or their interest to investors. However, Tareef indicated that since the new companies law was issued in 1997, the stock market witnessed encouraging results as the volume of government bonds and other debentures issued until October amounted to JD53.5 million. "It is expected that this activity would encourage another number of companies to resort to such tools to finance their future projects," Tareef said.

Noting that the stock exchange has continued to implement the agreement signed with the Paris Bourse and the French depository centre for modernising the trading mechanism and setting up a depository and transfer centre, Tareef expected trading to be conducted electronically by the end of this year. He explained that the shares of companies will be gradually traded electronically and that this change will have a major positive effect on the efficiency and security of trading and, consequently will enhance confidence in the securities market.

Within the process of mechanising the operations of the AFM and the depository and transfer centre, a special building was rented to serve as a temporary site for the Amman Bourse until the permanent site is completed.

Currently, Tareef said, the practical steps are being taken to equip the temporary building with all the technical equipment and networks including a movable screen and offices for brokers.

Jordanian businessmen prepare to visit Palestinian areas next month

AMMAN (Petra) — The Jordan Trade Association (JTA) is currently preparing for a visit, expected in the first week of March, by Jordanian exporters, industrialists and investors to the Palestine self-rule areas.

Noting that the visit aims at further bolstering bilateral economic cooperation, JTA's Vice President Kamal Qaqish said the Jordanian delegation that plans to visit the Palestinian territories will represent a great number of Jordanian firms dealing with various industries.

He said the visit is bound to boost ties between the

private sectors in Jordan and Palestine, and to increase the volume of trade exchange between the two sides.

Qaqish indicated that the delegation will hold contacts with Palestinian officials and government institutions including the chambers of commerce and industry and the Palestine Businessmen Association and the ministry of industry and trade among others.

He said the JTA has started making arrangements for meetings between the private business communities during the March visit not-

ing that the delegation will be visiting the cities of Jenin, Nablus, Hebron, Tulkarm, Ramallah, Gaza and Bethlehem as well as Jerusalem.

Qaqish said the JTA hopes to intensify efforts to increase the volume of Jordanian-Palestinian trade and to overcome obstacles standing in the way pointing out that Jordan's exports to Palestine since the start of 1998 and until the end of last September were worth JD11.6 million while Jordanian imports from Palestine in the same period were worth JD11.5 million

compared to 1997 when Jordan's exports to Palestine reached JD12 million and imports JD 33 million.

JTA Director General Halim Abu Rahmeh said the visit coincides with some positive developments like the recent agreement on exempting products exported to Palestine from customs duty, extending the hours of duty on the King Hussein Bridge for two more hours and opening the bridge for six hours on holidays and Fridays to help facilitate trade.

Abu Rahmeh referred to the minutes of deliberations at a meeting of the Higher Joint Jordanian-Palestinian committee last September saying that the two sides took very important decisions relevant to economic cooperation and boosting trade and facilities for financing trade and for visit exchanges between businessmen on both sides.

Abu Rahmeh announced that the JTA will organise a special seminar on trade between Jordan and Palestine in the coming few weeks to be attended by officials from both sides.

A.F.M TRADE Sunday, 24-01-99 ACCESS 4646868

Company	Open	Close	Change
BANKS			
ARAB BK	217.250	217.750	+0.23%
NTL BK	1.550	1.540	-0.65%
BK OF JO	1.230	1.230	0.00%
MIDDLE EAST BK	1.030	1.050	+2.91%
INDUSTRIAL DEV. BK	1.440	1.450	+3.47%
THE HOUSING BK	2.800	2.810	+0.36%
JO. KUWAIT BK	1.680	1.680	0.00%
JO. ISLAMIC BK	1.690	1.730	+2.37%
PHILADELPHIA BK	0.530	0.530	0.00%

BANKS INDEX 284.780 point = +0.30%

INSURANCE			
ARABIAN SEAS INS	1.050	1.060	+0.95%
JO. FRENCH INS	2.700	2.690	-0.37%
AMIA INS	1.160	1.100	-5.17%
INSURANCE INDEX	126.030	point =	-0.27%

SERVICES INDEX 111.390 point = -0.08%

INDUSTRY			
CEMENT	3.570	3.720	+4.20%
PHOSPHATE	1.970	2.060	+4.57%
ARAB POTASH	3.750	3.940	+5.07%
PETROLEUM REFINERY	10.630	10.630	0.00%
THE IND. COM. & AGRI	1.080	1.080	0.00%
WORSTED MILLS	6.450	6.390	-2.75%
ARAB PHARMACEUTICAL	2.910	3.000	+3.09%
TOBACCO & CIGARET	1.230	1.240	+0.81%
ARAB CHEMICAL DETER	7.050	7.020	-0.43%
DAR AL DAWA	5.200	5.450	+5.00%
MIDDLE EAST COMPLEX	0.560	0.560	-1.79%
JO. STEEL	0.950	0.960	+1.05%
ARAB ALUMINIUM	1.860	1.900	+2.15%
LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	0.400	0.410	+2.50%
NTL IND	0.350	0.360	+2.86%
TEXTILE - CHEMICAL	0.350	0.330	-0.00%
CHEMICAL & VEGETABL	0.570	1.020	+5.15%
ROCKWOOL	0.250	0.290	0.00%
UNIVERSAL CHEMICAL	1.040	1.000	-3.85%
SULPHO - CHEMICALS	0.370	0.380	+2.70%
ARAB CENTER FOR PHAR	1.300	1.290	-0.77%
TEL. ZAY	1.300	1.300	0.00%
UNIVERSAL MODERN IND	0.680	0.700	+2.94%
NTL ALUMINIUM	0.700	0.700	0.00%

INDUSTRY INDEX 92.590 point = +3.50%

PARALLEL			
EXPORT BK (75	0.900	0.890	-1.11%
JO. TRADING FACILITIES	0.410	0.400	-2.44%
UNION INVS. CORP	0.730	0.740	+1.37%
AL. BICAL	0.800	0.800	0.00%
ADVANCED PHAR	0.550	0.540	-1.82%
AL. SHARO	1.030	1.000	-2.91%
MEDICAL APPLIANCES	0.370	0.360	-2.70%
AL DAWLAW	0.580	0.590	+1.72%
ARAB INTL. TRADE	0.210	0.210	0.00%
OPTICAL & AUDIAL	0.410	0.410	0.00%
NAMICO	0.250	0.250	0.00%
MIDDLE EAST PHAR (80	0.890	0.910	+2.33%
UNION TOBACCO	3.010	3.030	+0.66%
AL-KAZI	0.550	0.550	0.00%
GRAND INDEX	178.6	point =	+1.05%

Governing board of Amman Bourse will be elected in March

By Tareq Ayyoub

AMMAN — The governing board which will supervise the activities of the Amman Bourse will be elected next month by the general assembly of the Amman Financial Market (AFM), a spokesman of the bourse said Sunday.

Abdul Rahman Touqan, chairman of the bourse's establishment board, said the seven-member board, will replace the current management of the stock market.

Touqan indicated that three seats will be allocated to the brokers in the market and four seats divided equally between the Jordan Securities Commission and commercial banks listed on the stock market.

"Our main objective is to help activate investment in the bourse as well as supervise the trading activity," Touqan told the Jordan Times.

The 1998 Securities Law stipulates the establishment of a Securities Commission, an Amman Bourse and a Depository and Transfer Centre, which will all cooperate in running the upcoming bourse, scheduled to be launched on March 11.

The state-run Amman Financial Market (AFM) now oversees the bourse with a regulatory role. It will be replaced by a new private sector bourse.

Touqan said the bourse management will be an "independent entity" that will find the proper tools to activate the circulation of stocks in the bourse.

It will also prepare for replacing the current manual method of trading by a computerised system along with other regulations to operate the bourse, he added.

Naim Naqeeb, a broker at the stock market, said trading will be enhanced upon transferring the management of the bourse to the private sector which will be given five seats on board of directors.

"The private sector is capable of running the stock market more efficiently and that will be in the benefit of the bourse as a whole," Naqeeb said.

Shares of at least 160 firms are registered and traded on the stock market. Earlier this month, Jordan Securities Commission

Chairman Bassam Saket indicated that foreign buying has raised non-Jordanian share ownership to 44.3 per cent of the JD4.1 billion capitalised market, against 38.3 per cent in 1997.

Foreign investors bought JD205 million worth of stocks in 1998 compared to JD100 million in the previous year, Saket said.

He said net turnover amounted to JD464 million and that the AFM's price index stood at 170 points at the end of 1998, a modest 0.05 points up from 1997.

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Iran to borrow \$1 billion for agriculture investment

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran's parliament has authorised the government to borrow \$1 billion from abroad to invest in the agriculture sector during the 12 months beginning March, newspapers have reported.

The assembly has already given the government the green light to seek foreign investment of up to \$6 billion in the energy sector during the next Iranian year which starts March 21.

It also authorised borrowing of up to \$3.5 billion for funding petrochemical and telecommunication project as well as for dam construction.

According to forecasts made by parliament, the country will earn about \$12 billion from exports of oil-related products next year, which is \$5 billion less than the revenues anticipated for the current year.

The Iranian economy has been badly hit by the plummeting price of oil on world markets as the country depends on oil sales for about 80 per cent of its hard currency earnings.

FORECAST FOR MONDAY, JANUARY 25, 1999

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) There's a good chance that you've got a cold. It's unusual for an Aries to get sick, so you may not recognise it. You may just be feeling lazy and beating yourself up about it. Stop that! You hereby have permission to stay in bed and watch-TV.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) There's good information coming in today. Your mind is like a sponge, soaking up everything you can find. Don't waste your memory banks on trivia. Remember the old computer jargon about garbage in, garbage out? Well, stay away from the garbage dump today.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) There's money coming into your account today. You want to spend it on travel. If you're not careful, you might spend it on travel before you actually get the money. That is not usually a good idea, but today it could work. Have a great time while you're at it.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) People are noticing what you've been doing, and they're favourably impressed. Don't get a swelled head, though. What's more important is the money you're able to put in the bank. Do that first, before you go to the mall. Don't forget to stash some into a savings account you can't get at.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) There might be some serious shopping to do. Get a Cancer or Taurus friend to help with a big purchasing decision. You might wind up buying something that's damaged or used, but that's OK. Once you polish it up, nobody will know you paid half price for it.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) You could find yourself on a tour or a cruise or a volunteer committee. Think of whatever you like to do, then do it. It looks like there's service involved, which is not at all unusual for you. So get out and take care of others and you'll make a lot of great friends in the process.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) Your assignment today is to provide what's required. Pay attention to what an older person needs and see if there's some way you can help. Good deeds you do now will be repaid to you later. That's not always the case, but this time it looks like a pretty even trade.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) Travel and romance are the theme. In fact, you could be halfway across the country by now. Or you could travel via video, which would work just as well. And less chance of losing your luggage! Either way, you must have a romantic, exciting interlude. That's top priority no matter where you are.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Figure out how much money you've got and make up a list of all the stuff you need to buy, including educational expenses. Money from savings might even be used to buy new tools or equipment. That's OK. That's what you've been saving it for.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) Sometimes you get so busy there's no time for affection. Well, there will be time today, if you make it happen. This doesn't have to be romantic love. It could be the love of a parent for a child, or the love of a kid for his dog. Whatever your object of affection, you need to let him or her know.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) Investigate ways to save money. For example, if you have fruit trees, there's no reason you should ever have to buy fruit. There's work involved, but you can put up what you need for later. If that's to a good analogy for you, think of a better one... and get busy!

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) You're likely to get bold and outspoken this evening, probably in a romantic setting. So make a date with someone with whom you'd like to make a lifelong commitment. If you're already in a lifelong commitment with that person, so much the better.

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Philippoussis picks Enqvist-Agassi final

MELBOURNE (AFP) — Sweden's Thomas Enqvist underlined his claim to the Australian Open title with a compelling five-set win over Mark Philippoussis here Sunday.

The unseeded Enqvist, who knocked out U.S. Open champion Pat Rafter in the third round, triumphed 6-2, 6-4, 6-7 (3/7), 4-6, 6-2 over the 14th seeded Philippoussis.

Philippoussis later said only fifth seeded Andre Agassi could prevent Enqvist from winning the title.

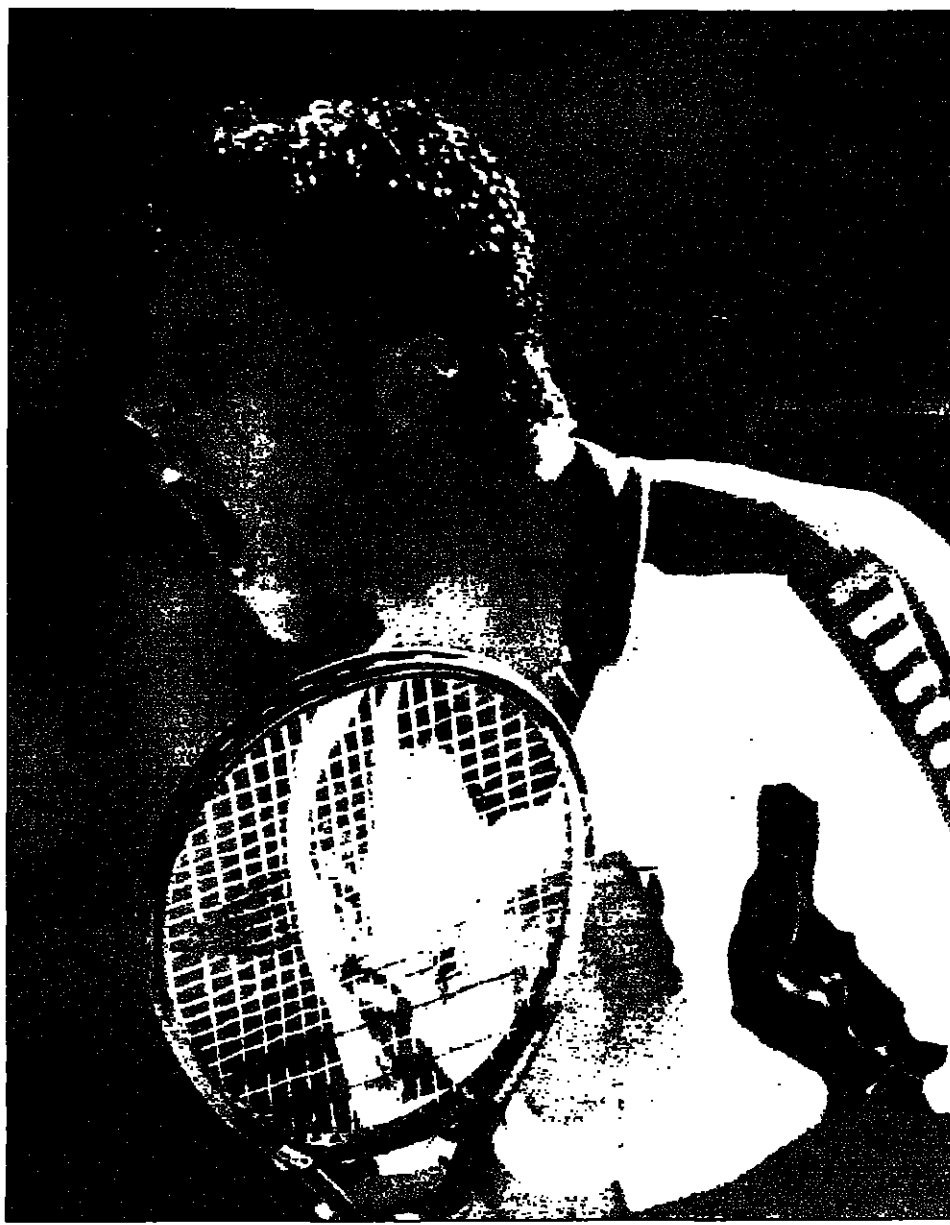
"I can't see anyone hurting Thomas except for Andre," said Australia's last hope for tournament. Enqvist and Agassi look now as if they could meet in next Sunday's final.

Only four men's seeds — Agassi (5), Karol Kucera (7), Yevgeny Kafelnikov (10) and Todd Martin (15) — qualified for the quarter-finals after an opening week which saw defending champion Petr Korda dumped out in the third round.

Korda returns to the Czech Republic a chastened man with his career in doubt after being dragged through the grinder over a steroid test he failed at last year's Wimbledon.

Ironically, the man to send him home was Todd Martin, the American president of the ATP Players' Council who had convinced his fellow professionals on the eve of the championships Korda should be allowed to play.

Jim Courier, a former world number one and double champion here, even went so far as to suggest other players may be using the undetectable EPO drug cyclists take to



Mark Philippoussis of Australia screams in frustration during his match against Thomas Enqvist of Sweden at the Australian Open Tennis Championships, Melbourne, Australia, on Sunday. Philippoussis lost the match 6-2, 6-4, 6-7, (3-7), 4-6, 6-2. (AP photo)

improve stamina.

International Tennis Federation president Brian Tobin was forced to call a press conference to deny drugs was a major problem in tennis.

But he agreed the Korda let-off had been badly handled.

Top seed Marcelo Rios of Chile and No. 10 Goran Ivanisevic of Croatia withdrew injured without playing on the opening day, raising concerns the Australian Open was too early in a long season.

World No. 1 Pete Sampras had already decided to opt out for that very reason.

The biggest losers were the Spanish, whose 14 men's players were all sunk by the second round. They included French

Open champion and No. 4 seed Carlos Moya and second seed Alex Corretja, who had won the ATP world championship in Germany in November.

Neither of their executioners — Nicolas Pietrangeli of Germany and Christian Ruud of Norway — progressed into the second week.

The most impressive players to emerge from the first week were Agassi and Kucera, neither of whom dropped a set.

Agassi, who has had to climb out of a deep hole to get back among the top 10, believes he is playing his best tennis since losing to Sampras in the 1995 US Open final.

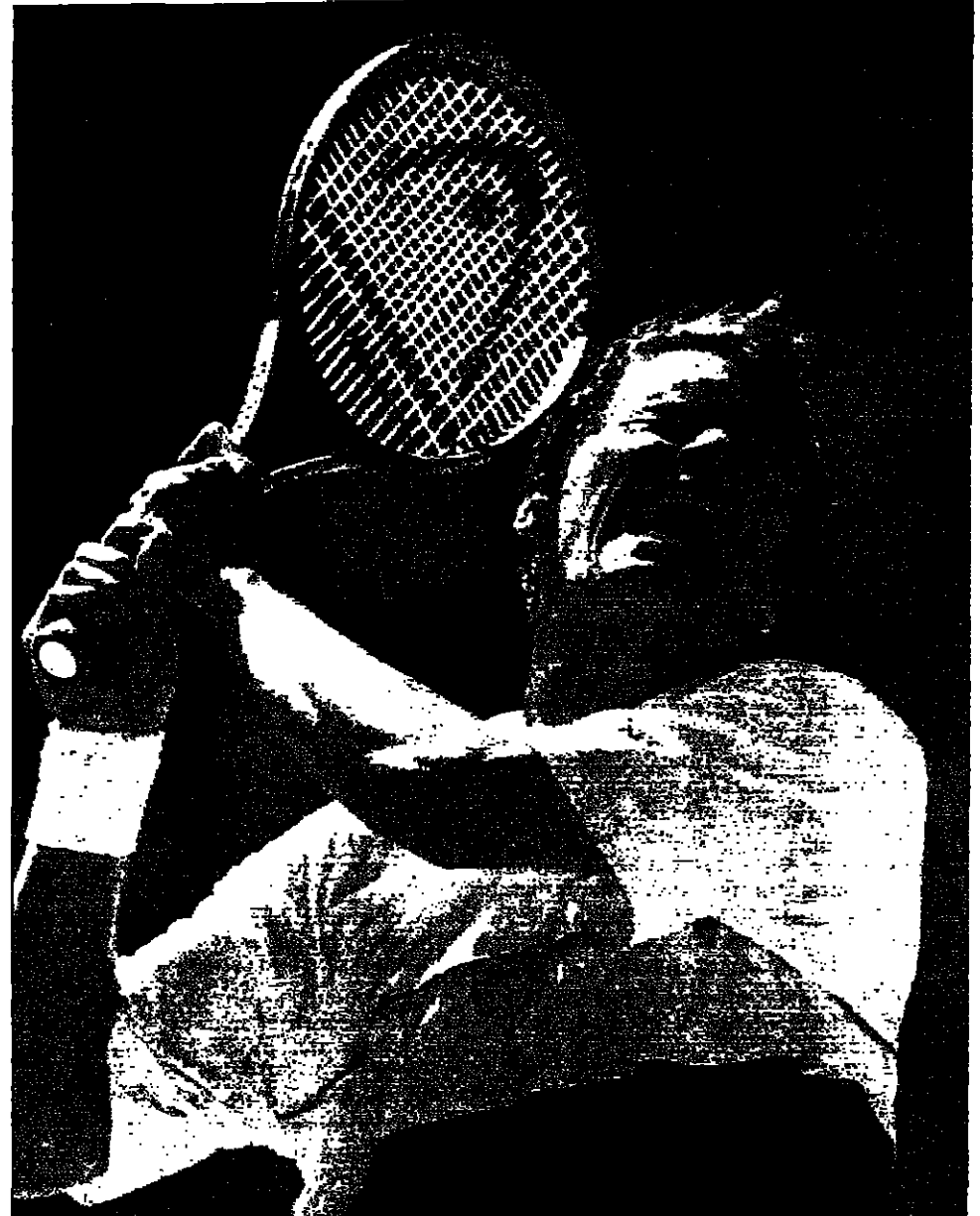
The statistics prove he was the best player under pressure, having saved and converted more break points than anyone. Kucera ranked second best.

In the women's singles, Wimbledon champion Jana Novotna of the Czech Republic, the third seed who was playing here for the first time in three years, and French Open champion Arantxa Sanchez Vicario of Spain were early casualties but generally the seedings went to form.

U.S. Open champion Lindsay Davenport set up a quarter-final date with No. 5 Venus Williams.

Second seed and defending champion Martina Hingis should line up against No. 7 Mary Pierce, while Monica Seles and Steffi Graf were likely to renew their rivalry in the last eight, although both felt they had yet to produce their best tennis.

The only surprise was unseeded Amelie Mauresmo of France.



Thomas Enqvist of Sweden screams during his match against Mark Philippoussis of Australia at the Australian Open Tennis Championships, Melbourne, Australia, on Sunday. Enqvist won the match 6-2, 6-4, 6-7, (3-7), 4-6, 6-2. (AP photo)

The 19-year-old will play Belgium's Dominique Van Roost, the 11th seed, in her first Grand Slam quarter-final. Van Roost, yet to play on a show court, proved herself the best pressure-player going

into the women's quarter-finals.

But the biggest talking point in the women's draw was Anna Kournikova's case of the yips.

The Russian 12th seed has lost her serve. She

chalked up an Australian Open record 31 double faults against Japan's Miho Saeki, who still failed to win, before squeezing through to a fourth round match with Pierce on Monday.

Davenport sinks Drake, sets course for Venus

MELBOURNE (AFP) — Women's top seed Lindsay Davenport swept into the quarter-finals with a crushing 6-1, 6-3 win in 47 minutes over Canadian qualifier Maureen Drake in the fourth round of the Australian Open here Sunday.

The U.S. Open champion and World No. 1, who has yet to drop a set, now plays fifth seed and fellow American Venus Williams in Tuesday's quarter-finals.

"It's tough to tell what form I'm in. I'm just playing solid tennis and have done what is needed to win. But I haven't done anything extraordinary," she said.

"The tactics will be to force errors rather than make winners," added Davenport, who has a 6-1 record over Williams.

"She plays fast so I will need to hit the ball deep."

Williams said after beating fellow American Chanda Rubin she was ready for a fight.

"I'm going to have to move forward and take my opportunities. I've got to step up and show I'm ready to do battle," said the 18-year-old, who reached at least the quarter-finals of all four Grand Slam tournaments last year.

Williams lost to Davenport at both the Australian and U.S. Open quarter-finals last year, as well as in finals at Stanford, USA, and Zurich.

"I suppose she has played the big points better but I have improved," she warned.

"I'll approach the match like any other match. I realise it will be the quarter-final of a Grand Slam and against the world No. 1, but I have some rights of my own. I have something to take with me."



Venus Williams of Palm Beach Gardens, FL, shoots back during her match against fellow American Chanda Rubin of Lafayette, La, at the Australian Open Tennis Championships in Melbourne, Australia, on Sunday. Williams won the match 7-6, 6-4. (AP photo)

Sampras sleeping easy with ranking safe

MELBOURNE (AFP) — Pete Sampras will be sleeping easy Sunday, his grip on world tennis safe.

A week into the Australian Open, just four men's seeds remain in the tournament and none of them can topple the exhausted world No. 1 from his mantle.

Mid-week the statisticians announced that four players — Alex Corretja, Carlos Moya, Pat Rafter and Andre Agassi — were in with a chance of being crowned king.

Come Sunday only Agassi remained and he cannot make it. Even if he wins the title there are not enough top names left for him to compile the 261 bonus points needed.

The seeds have been falling at such a rate that if Todd Martin had lost his third round clash with Petr Korda late Friday, there would have been fewer seeds in a Grand Slam fourth round than at any other time in the Open era.

Local favourite Pat Rafter blew his chance in the third round when Thomas Enqvist stole the thunder. All Rafter had to do was make the final and the ultimate tennis accolade, plus the commercial opportunities that accompany it, was his. It was much the same story for Moya, while the task for Spain's Corretja was even easier. A semi-final berth would have almost cer-

Australian Open diary

MELBOURNE (AFP) — The 250,000 people to pass through the gates diary on Sunday: — Surprise quarter-finalist Nicolas Pietrangeli of Ecuador owes it to celebrated Andre Corretja for his career in tennis.

Lapentil was a 13-year-old watching back home on television in Guayaquil when Corretja upset Andre Agassi in the 1990 French Open final at Roland Garros final to be the most of international tennis.

"He has helped me a lot," Lapentil admitted. "He was my idol when I was a little kid," says the world No. 91.

"He doesn't say much, but when he does he says important things," says Lapentil.

— Open champion Pat Rafter has a message for the middle class for tennis.

"What tennis needs is some working-class icons," he said. "Tim Henman is a nice guy and a very good player, but he has that comfortable middle-class look about him."

— After a hectic week, tennis stars are local favourites. Rafter is a popular local hero, but his opponent, Enqvist, is also a local hero.

— My tournament schedule this year has been cut from about 26 to 19 and I am really looking forward to taking more breaks this year, he says.

— It's just too hard to keep playing 26 tournaments a year. I want to have a time year and try and condition myself better and enjoy myself a little more.

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Listings for films and showing times as received by cinemas and their advertising agencies.

Sports

Yorke and Solskjaer pounce to shatter Liverpool

LONDON (AFP) — Two goals in the last three minutes by Dwight Yorke and Ole Gunnar Solskjaer gave Manchester United a dramatic 2-1 victory over bitter rivals Liverpool in their FA Cup fourth round showdown at Old Trafford on Sunday.

Michael Owen had headed Liverpool in front after only three minutes and United had looked to be on their way out until Yorke tapped home a deserved equaliser with two minutes left.

Solskjaer, who was sent on for the last seven minutes by coach Alex Ferguson, then sent the 54,000 Old Trafford crowd into a frenzy when he drilled in the winner in time added on.

Holders Arsenal were due to play Wolverhampton Wanderers at Molineux later on Sunday.

The big shock on Saturday saw second division Fulham knock out joint Premiership leaders Aston Villa 2-0 at Villa Park.

Liverpool caught United napping in the opening minutes. Norwegian wing-back Vegard Heggem overlapped down the right and pinpointed his cross onto the head of an unmarked Owen who guided the ball down past United goalkeeper Peter Schmeichel and into the net.

United were almost level after 20 minutes when Roy Keane's header from a tight

angle brushed the post before bouncing off Liverpool's Paul Ince on the line and into the grateful arms of 'keeper David James.

But Liverpool were soaking up what pressure there

was without difficulty and almost made it 2-0 before half-time when Robbie Fowler hit a first-time curl-

near-post save out of Schmeichel. Ince, playing against his old team, headed the resulting corner straight

at United's Great Dane as the visitors finished the half well on top.

United came out bristling after the interval and Ryan Giggs almost pounced an equaliser within five minutes after David Beckham's

Gerard Houllier's side were lucky on the hour when Keane's 18-metre drive deflected agonisingly past James' post.

Fowler casually lost possession five minutes later and United's Andy Cole saw his shot on the turn deflected over the bar by Jamie Carragher. United brought on Paul Scholes to add some craft up front and Liverpool were again fortunate when Gary Neville's cross was sliced straight at his own goalkeeper by Liverpool defender Dominic Matteo.

Keane was once again left cursing his luck after 80 minutes when his 15-metre effort cannoned off James' right-hand post while Fowler should have done better at the other end from substitute Jason McAteer's late cross.

Ferguson threw on super-sub Solskjaer as his last resort and United finally claimed their equaliser two minutes from time. Cole headed Beckham's free-kick into the path of Yorke, who couldn't miss his 17th goal of the season.

Then, with a replay looking inevitable, Solskjaer lashed in a low near post effort after Scholes had controlled the ball in the area and United, somehow, were through.



Manchester United's Ole Gunnar Solskjaer (3rd right) celebrates with teammates, after scoring the winning goal for his team during their FA Cup 4th round clash against Liverpool at Old Trafford, Manchester, on Sunday (AP photo)



Slovenia's Jure Kosir reacts after crossing the finish line to take first place in the men's slalom World Cup race in Kitzbuhel, Austria, on Sunday (AP photo)

Nothing slovenly about Kosir as he takes slalom

KITZBUHEL, Austria (AFP) — Slovenian skier Jure Kosir won the men's World Cup slalom race here on Sunday posting a time of 1min 36.40sec.

The 26-year-old, the 1994 Olympic bronze medalist in the event, beat Swiss racer Didier Paschy by four-hundredths of a second with Giorgio Rocca of Italy third just seven-hundredths of a second in arrears.

Kosir, who won his third career slalom race and second this season after winning on home turf in Kranjska Gora earlier this month, was just third after the first run but mistakes by the first-leg leader, Frenchman Pierrel Bourgeat, and series pacer

setter, Thomas Stangassinger of Austria, who was second on the first leg, left him clear.

Bourgeat, who won the slalom in Park City earlier in the season, collapsed completely to finish eighth overall while Stangassinger, who still leads the standings, was edged into fourth.

The first leg claimed some notable victims with the Austrian duo of dual Olympic gold medalist Hermann Maier and rising star Benjamin Raich crashed out, along with Norway's Olympic titleholder Hans-Peter Buraas.

IOC investigation drags into second day

LAUSANNE, Switzerland (AP) — IOC leaders held a special meeting Sunday to decide whether members should be expelled in connection with the Salt Lake City bribery scandal.

A six-man IOC investigative panel concluded its report Sunday morning into the cash payments, scholarships and other favours connected with Salt Lake City's winning bid for the 2002 Winter Games.

The panel, which met for 15 hours Saturday and reconvened early Sunday, reported its findings to the IOC executive board.

IOC officials said the executive board began its own meeting to consider the evidence and make final recommendations.

Officials said the IOC planned to go ahead with a scheduled news conference at 7 p.m. (1800 GMT), where IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch is due to announce proposed expulsions of members and reforms of the Olympic site-selection process.

"Anita DeFrantz, an IOC vice president and executive board member from the United States, said Sunday's meetings will be vital for the future of the Olympics.

"My hope is the athletes of the world understand we're very serious about making sure the games continue," she said as she left her hotel for IOC headquarters.

"Sydney will host the (2000) games, Salt Lake will host the (2002) games. Anyone who violates their oath of office can't be a part of the Olympic movement. The end."

The credibility of the IOC and the future of the games themselves was at stake as officials sought to close the internal probe into the Salt Lake City bribery scandal.

Thirteen members were cited for accepting inducements — reportedly totalling close to \$800,000 — from Salt Lake boosters.

Two of the 13 members — Finland's Pirjo Haeggman and Libya's Bashir Mohammed Attarabulsi — resigned this week. Samaranch said another seven could face expulsion orders.

The IOC said six members appeared before the inquiry commission in person Saturday to defend themselves. They were not identified.

Members who didn't appear will be judged on written replies submitted earlier to the IOC.

The recommendations of the

board will be put to a special meeting of the general assembly March 17-18.

If members found guilty of corruption refuse to resign, their case will go to the assembly, where a two-thirds vote is required for expulsion.

Several of the implicated members have said they will fight rather than be ousted.

Jean-Claude Ganga of the Republic of Congo, who has been accused of accepting at least \$70,000 of cash inducements, has defiantly proclaimed his innocence and vowed he'll never resign.

Sergio Santander, the IOC member from Chile who was among the six delegates questioned Saturday, said he did nothing wrong and indicated he had no plans to quit.

"I am certain that I didn't act incorrectly at any moment,"

Santander told reporters in Lausanne Sunday. "Whatever happens today, I will stay in a calm and secure position in the belief that truth will prevail."

Santander was implicated after Tom Welch, the former Salt Lake bid and organising committee chief, said he donated \$10,000 to

Santander's campaign for mayor of Santiago, Chile.

Sudanese IOC member Gen. Zein el-Abdin Ahmed Abdel-Gadir expressed confidence he would be cleared. He was among those who had replied to the accusations in writing.

IOC leaders were also seeking to control the damage from the latest revelations in the unfolding crisis that Australian officials used financial inducements to help Sydney win the right to stage the 2000 Summer Games.

Australian IOC executive board member Kevin Gosper said Saturday he saw nothing "sinister" in the \$70,000 inducements offered by Australia's Olympics chief to two African IOC members the night before Sydney won the vote for the 2000 games.

Sydney beat Beijing 45-43 in the secret balloting in 1993.

Gosper said the IOC would discuss the Australian payments on Sunday and could order a full-scale investigation of Sydney's bid. He said he would propose that the board reaffirm that the games will go ahead in Sydney and Salt Lake.

Meissnitzer wins giant slalom to extend lead

CORTINA D'AMPEZZO, Italy (AFP) — Austrian skier Alexandra Meissnitzer extended her lead in the World Cup overall standings when she won the women's giant slalom race here on Sunday in a time of 2min 26.20sec.

The 25-year-old, Olympic silver medalist in this event, beat home Germany's Martina Ertl, who had a combined time of 2min 26.83sec over the two legs, and another Austrian Anita Wachter was third in 2min 27.02sec.

Meissnitzer, who won her sixth race of the season, led after the first leg and was virtually assured of victory, barring a mishap, when rising French star Regine Cavagnoud, who was second on the first leg, failed to shine and slipped back to fourth overall.

Wachter, 31, continued to show impressive form after her comeback from

a horrendous knee injury that virtually ended her career a year ago, surging from fifth to third on the final run.

Italian favourite Deborah Compagnoni had a nightmare day, exiting at the fifth gate of the first leg, while Swiss star Corinne Rey-Bellet also found the fifth gate a miss too far.

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Al-Futtaim SONS أبناء الفطيم

Arafat may consider delaying statehood declaration — officials

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (R) — Yasser Arafat would consider delaying a statehood declaration if the European Union (EU) and the United States recognise a Palestinian state and Israel meets certain conditions, Palestinian officials said on Sunday.

They said representatives of the 15-nation EU have recently met discreetly with Palestinian officials and suggested Arafat postpone declaration of a state from May to an unspecified date.

Arafat has said that he reserves the right to proclaim an independent state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip on May 4, when a five-year interim period for negotiating a permanent settlement with Israel expires under the Oslo accords.

"Arafat is willing to consider delaying a Palestinian state until December this year if the EU and the U.S. recognise the state, and if Israel meets certain Palestinian demands," said a Palestinian official, who spoke

on condition of anonymity.

"These demands include freezing Jewish settlement building on occupied Palestinian land and implementing the Wye River deal," the official said, referring to the land-for-security accord signed in October and which Israel suspended last month.

In addition, the official said, Arafat wanted an international commitment to accept Dec. 31 as the new deadline to conclude the interim deals signed with Israel.

"If we have international commitments to accept a new date such as Dec. 31, then we would delay. If we don't have a deal with Israel by then, we then have the right to declare a state that should be recognised by the world," another official said.

A senior EU delegation plans to hold talks with the Palestinian president next week in Europe on a comprehensive proposal in return for putting off a unilateral declaration, Palestinian officials said.

Arafat will meet U.S. President Bill Clinton in Washington in the first week of February to discuss the peace process, the officials said.

They said Egypt would contact the EU on the Palestinians' behalf to work on securing the guarantees Arafat needs to accept postponing the declaration of a state.

Arafat has come under mounting international pressure to delay declaring a state before the Israeli elections on May 17.

But since Israel moved elections forward from late 2000, he has refused to give a firm indication he will proceed with such a declaration on May 4.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who opposes Palestinian statehood, has used the prospect of a unilateral declaration as a main card in his reelection drive.

The EU does not oppose Palestinian self-determination but wants the Palestinians to negotiate independence with Israel.



HOLIDAY PREPARATIONS: Malaysian Hindu devotee Sugunadewi Kumaran puts final touches on a doll Sunday as part of Thaipuam preparation at Kuala Lumpur's Batu Caves Temple. The centuries-old festival, in honour of Hindu god Murugan, will be celebrated Jan. 31 by Hindus throughout Malaysia with more fervour here than back in India, where the practice has almost died out. Devotees observe a rigorous regimentation of spirituality in a month-long run to Thaipuam, including dawn-to-dusk fasts and a vegetarian diet (Reuters photo)

Papal blessing unlikely for saint of narcotics

CULIACAN (R) — Pope John Paul may not know or approve, but the country where he is currently on a four-day visit has a "Patron Saint of the Drug Traffickers" in its panoply of unofficial icons. In this capital city of Mexico's northern state of Sinaloa, a plaster image of a moustachioed man with a white shirt and black scarf stands in a rudimentary "chapel." The statue is in honour of Jesus Malverde, a Mexican-style Robin Hood who robbed the rich to help the poor earlier this century and who now attracts a following of misfits — everyone from common crooks to big-time drug dealers.

Swindlers dupe U.S. woman in Pinochet scam

SANTIAGO (R) — Swindlers duped an unidentified U.S. woman out of about \$840 by convincing her the money would be donated to the London defence fund of Chile's former dictator Augusto Pinochet, the state-owned daily La Nacion said Friday. Police said Luis Guzman and Sergio Reyes persuaded the woman, living 470 miles south of Santiago, to hand over 400,000 pesos (\$840) in cash to offset the legal costs of the retired general. The money was never deposited in Pinochet's accounts.

'Supermother' to have her 20th baby

LONDON (AFP) — A 40-year-old British "super-mother" is pregnant with her 20th baby, a Sunday paper reported. Nicola Pridham, 40, of Lincoln in eastern England, is expecting her newest arrival on May 3. The News of the World tabloid said Pridham has had one child every year over two decades but still has a long way to go before she beats the all-time British and world records. The world record of 69 was set by a Russian peasant in 1782, and the current British record was set by Elizabeth Mott of Kirby, central England, who had 42 children between 1676 and 1720.

Counterfeiters turn to parking permits

EL PASO (R) — Counterfeit parking permits for reserved handicapped spaces are flooding into this southwest Texas city from across the border in Mexico, city officials say. The fake parking cards cost only \$10 but look very authentic, said Victor Flores, El Paso county tax assessor. Genuine handicapped parking cards, which are hung on the rear-view mirror, only cost \$5 in El Paso County. But for the many Mexican citizens who cross into El Paso everyday for work or leisure, the permits have become more difficult to acquire since state law was changed in 1997 to require a signature from Texas-licensed physicians. This meant applications for the cards could no longer come from doctors in Mexico, officials said.

Car thieves choose wrong parking place

PRAGUE (AFP) — Car thieves, police in pursuit, turned their sights on a Mercedes into what was thought was a good parking place Sunday in the city of Trutnov in the Czech Republic, but quickly caught and arrested. It was the police station's parking lot.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Two dead, four injured in Algeria attacks

ALGIERS (AFP) — Two people were killed and four injured in Algeria on Friday and Saturday in two attacks blamed on armed Islamists, press reports said Sunday. Two army conscripts had their throats slit Friday evening by a group of armed Islamists at a fake roadblock set up on a main road near the town of Taurirt in the Bouira region, 120 kilometres east of Algiers. Local security forces intervened and chased off the group, consisting of a dozen men. One security force member was wounded in a gunfire exchange with the Islamists, newspapers reported. On Saturday evening, three people in a car were seriously injured when their vehicle hit a bomb placed on the roadside near the coastal town of Ain Tagourait, west of Algiers. In addition, the government-run daily Al Moudjahid said two of its newspaper delivery staff narrowly escaped death Saturday morning after being stopped at a fake roadblock near Souk Al Had, some 60 kilometres from Algiers.

'Sudan plane bombs rebel-held town'

NAIROBI (R) — A Sudan air force plane dropped 10 bombs on the rebel-held town of Yei, in southern Sudan on Sunday, the rebel Sudan Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA) said in Nairobi. According to the SPLA spokesman, the bombs narrowly missed the local hospital, but killed two women and a four-year-old child. Last week the SPLA reported a similar bombing attack on nearby Kaji Kaji, close to the Uganda border.

Thousands remember slain journalist

ISTANBUL (AFP) — Thousands of Turks turned out across the country Sunday to commemorate the sixth anniversary of the murder of a prominent journalist and to demand that his killers be found and brought to justice. Ugur Mumcu, a reporter for the daily Cumhuriyet who had been investigating links between the mafia and the state, was killed by a bomb placed in his car in Ankara on Jan. 24, 1993. The murder is widely believed to have been committed by gangs operating with the implicit consent of the state and licensed to kill political dissenters, but no arrests have yet been made. At ceremonies in several cities on Sunday, mourners carried candles and pictures of Mumcu, and laid flowers and wreaths at memorial stones for the journalist.

Iraqi MPs to resume debate on Kuwait

BAGHDAD (R) — Iraq's parliament will resume a debate on Tuesday on whether the country should continue to recognise its 1991 Gulf war foe Kuwait and demarcation of borders between the two states, a senior MP said on Sunday. "The National Assembly will hold an extraordinary session to debate a number of issues, among them Iraq's recognition of Kuwait and borders between the two countries," said Khalid Al Douri, head of the parliament's Arab and Foreign Relations Committee. Douri said Iraq had met its commitments toward Kuwait but the emirate had not met its obligations toward Baghdad.

Mordechai firing leaves 'dangerous vacuum' — analysts

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Yitzhak Mordechai's removal as defence minister silenced one of the last moderates in Israel's government and fuelled fears Sunday that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu could be tempted into costly military actions to boost his troubled reelection campaign.

The firing of Mordechai has created a dangerous security vacuum, warned Zeev Schiff, the respected military analyst for the Haaretz newspaper.

"This security vacuum involves all the various arms of the military establishment, not just the defence ministry, and endangers various security interests," he said.

Netanyahu fired Mordechai late Saturday after the popular defence minister and former general moved to leave the ruling Likud party and join a new

centrist group to run for the prime ministership in May elections.

The split between the former allies was the severest blow yet to Netanyahu's hope for reelection following a series of defections by other senior Likud malcontents.

Mordechai was considered the most moderate minister in a government dominated by nationalist hawks and he constantly pressed Netanyahu, albeit unsuccessfully, to implement land-for-peace agreements with the Palestinians.

Military and political analysts noted Sunday that Mordechai had during his tenure also played a key role in preventing heavy-handed military operations sought by cabinet hardliners against the Palestinians, Lebanon, Syria and even Iraq.

"The question remains whether the people who stay behind after Mordechai leaves will be able to maintain the checks and balances... to prevent an unnecessary adventure," said Amos Harel, another Haaretz military expert.

Such concerns were heightened when Netanyahu offered Mordechai's job to Moshe Arens, an unabashed hawk who served as defence minister in 1983-84 and from 1990 to 1992.

In his years as a minister and member of parliament, Arens, 73, opposed the 1979 peace treaty with Egypt, the end of the costly 1982-85 war in Lebanon and the Oslo accords with the Palestinians.

He also reportedly argued for Israeli strikes against Iraq during the 1991 Gulf war. More recently Arens, who retired from active politics in

1992, announced a comeback to challenge Netanyahu for the Likud leadership, in part because of the government's concessions to the Palestinians.

The Likud leadership election is scheduled for Monday and Arens is not expected to decide whether to accept the defence job until after the vote.

Mordechai's departure comes as potential crises loom both with the Palestinians, with whom the outgoing minister maintained good relations, and in the Lebanon-Syria conflict.

Palestinian leaders have threatened to unilaterally declare an independent state if peace accords frozen by Netanyahu remain deadlocked on May 4, when interim agreements between the two sides expire. Netanyahu has vowed to

respond to such a move by annexing parts of the West Bank still under Israel's control, an action that could spark widespread violence.

In Lebanon, a recent escalation in attacks on soldiers guarding the Israeli-occupied buffer zone in the south of the country prompted several ministers to call for harsh retaliation against Lebanese civilian targets and Syrian forces stationed in Lebanon.

Military and defence ministry officials expressed concern in recent weeks that Netanyahu could be tempted to launch such attacks as a way of boosting his political standing.

Mordechai led opposition from the defence establishment to such reprisals, arguing they could lead to open conflict with Syria.

Turkey's PM calls for closer consultations with U.S. on Iraq

ANKARA (AFP) — Turkey's Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit on Sunday criticised U.S. policy on Iraq as "vague" and called for closer consultations between Washington and Ankara.

"We are the country most affected by the ongoing crisis," Ecevit said in an interview on the NTV news channel. "We are worried about the danger of a war."

"I think we need a dialogue with the United States to overcome the vagueness of their policy," Ecevit said. "We want to build a deeper dialogue with the United States."

In an interview with the daily Cumhuriyet published on Sunday, Ecevit said he was working on an alternative plan for the region.

"We don't really understand yet what the U.S. want to do," Ecevit told the paper.

"We must have a plan for the region."

The prime minister said he was currently updating an earlier policy paper from his time in the opposition.

The plan includes reassuring Baghdad about its territorial integrity, lifting the embargo if Iraq complies with U.N. resolutions, and helping to start a dialogue between Baghdad and Kurdish groups in northern Iraq, Ecevit said.

Ecevit also reiterated his reservations about the U.S. plan to assist Iraqi opposition groups in destabilising President Saddam Hussein.

"Ricciardone will certainly not work in Turkey," he said, referring to the current number two at Washington's embassy in Ankara, Frank Ricciardone, who was recently named special representative for transition in

Iraq.

"Turkey cannot be the place for this," Ecevit said.

The U.S. embassy earlier this week said Ricciardone would leave Ankara shortly and be based in Washington.

Turkey fears that Iraq may break up if Saddam Hussein is removed from power, leading to a Kurdish state being set up in northern Iraq and fanning unrest in Turkey's mainly Kurdish southeast.

Ankara is also worried about the rising tensions between its southern neighbour and the United States in the "no-fly" zone in northern Iraq. U.S. personnel this week installed a battery of Patriot missiles at the Turkish air base of Incirlik.

Turkey had asked for the missiles as protection against a possible Iraqi attack.

Palestinian prisoners begin hunger strike

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (R) — Palestinian political prisoners in a Palestinian jail in the West Bank city of Nablus began a hunger strike on Sunday to protest against their detention without trial, an international legal group said.

Law Society, an affiliate of the International Commission of Jurists based in Geneva, said 64 political prisoners in Jneid prison in self-ruled Nablus were on hunger strike.

"The political prisoners have renewed that their hunger strike was launched after 17 months of detention without trial or charges and after all decisions and promises to free them have been ignored," the organisation said in a statement.

"This is the fourth time prisoners in Jneid prison have staged a hunger strike. Some prisoners were released on Jan. 17," the legal group said.

Last month the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) gave the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) two weeks to free around 450 political prisoners from its jails or face a vote of no confidence. The PLC is scheduled to meet this week.

The PNA has come under sharp criticism from human rights organisations over the arrest of members of Palestinian opposition groups, mainly of them from the Islamist movement Hamas.

"Law Society has repeatedly stated that it opposes political detention on grounds that it is illegal and violates human rights and calls on the PNA to immediately free all political detainees," Law Society said.

Last week, Arafat freed several key Hamas and Islamic Jihad figures as a goodwill gesture for the Muslim feast, 'Eid Al Fitr.

Hardliners arrested in Iran for attacking Americans — report

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iranian authorities have arrested a number of Islamic extremists for attacking a group of visiting Americans in November, a newspaper reported Sunday.

"The masterminds behind the attack on the 13 Americans were arrested," said a front-page headline in Sobh-e Emruz (This Morning), a daily run by Saied Hajarian, a former senior intelligence ministry official.

A group of gun-toting hardliners attacked a bus carrying the Americans in mid-November after accusing them of being "CIA spies." The extremists

broke the windows of the bus, slightly injuring some of the occupants.

The Americans left the country the following day.

A shadowy group calling itself the Fedayeen (Devotees) of Islam claimed responsibility for the assault, issuing further warnings to "CIA spies visiting Iran in the guise of tourists," as well as Iranian authorities inviting them.

Officials and the press condemned the attack, with moderate President Mohammad Khatami describing it as "intolerable."

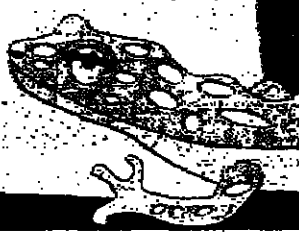
The Americans had been invited as part of an

effort by the government of moderate President Khatami to foster greater contact between the two nations which have been estranged since the 1979 Islamic revolution.

The foreign ministry said the U.S. nationals were visiting as tourists, but also to explore business opportunities in Iran.

Tehran and Washington severed diplomatic ties in 1980 after students seized the U.S. embassy here and took its staff hostage in protest at the United States' "imperialistic" attitude towards Iran.

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